

ISLAM FOR JOURNALISTS



A PRIMER ON COVERING
MUSLIM COMMUNITIES
IN AMERICA.

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Islam for Journalists

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Why We Compiled This Book



MORE than 30 years ago, I arrived in Beirut as CBS News Middle East correspondent. My qualifications for covering this complex region? I had been reporting on wars in Africa, so I knew how to dodge bullets. Oh, and I had taken a class on the Arab-Israeli conflict as an undergrad in college. Of Islam, the dominant religion in the region, I knew essentially nothing.

If foreign correspondents assigned to the Muslim world have such an inadequate understanding, there is no reason to expect reporters and editors based in the U.S. to be any more prepared to tackle stories involving Islam and Muslims.

But in many parts of the U.S., Islam and Muslims have become local news. So a bit of background can come in handy.

The problem is, entire sections of bookstores are devoted to Islam, terrorism, and related topics these days, and much of it reflects the huge ideological rift that surrounds the topic. What to read? Who to call? And how to penetrate all that academic gobbledy-gook and get to the basics when you're on deadline?

That's why we compiled this book and the associated online course at IslamForJournalists.com. It is meant to be a “how-to, what is” primer *by* journalists *for* journalists — and anyone else who wants a clear, straightforward briefing on this important topic. We have no axe to grind, other than a desire to see accurate, balanced reporting of this topic, which has such broad impact on American society today.

My project partner, Stephen Franklin, is a former *Chicago Tribune* Middle East reporter, who was a Knight International Journalism Fellow in the region. He has also trained journalists in Egypt and Turkey, taught courses on covering Islam at DePaul University, and recently created and led an online course on religion and politics for journalists across the globe for the International Center for Journalists.

My reporting background spans the Muslim world, from the first suicide bombing in modern history in Lebanon to the revolution in Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim country. I also headed the largest journalism training center in the Middle East, at The American University in Cairo. Along the way, I picked up a PhD in Islamic Studies, so I am painfully aware of how impenetrable much academic writing can be.

I am equally aware of the damage that can be wrought by uninformed, inaccurate or consciously provocative journalism.

Across the Muslim world today, extremists are wielding their swords with grisly effect, but the pen — and its modern day equivalents — can be just as lethal.

In the fall of 2012, the photo to the right began circulating on the web. It shows the editor of the French satirical magazine [*Charlie Hebdo*](#) (*Charlie Weekly*), who goes by the name Charb, holding in one hand a copy of that week's issue containing lewd cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad, with his other hand symbolically held aloft in a fist underscoring his self-proclaimed role as defender of press freedom. "I'm not the one going into the streets with stones and Kalashnikovs," he told the AP. He didn't need to; the weapon he controlled can do far more damage, as evident in the conflagration that was, at that moment, erupting across the Muslim world in reaction to [*a third-rate propaganda film*](#) produced by an Islamophobic Egyptian Coptic felon in California and readily seized on by Islamist hardliners to fuel their agenda. The *Charlie Hebdo* cartoons were oil on the fire.



But the provocation does not need to be deliberate. [A study](#) of eight years of British newspaper coverage by the Channel Four documentary unit found that

[t]wo-thirds focused on terrorism or cultural differences, and much of it used words such as militancy, radicalism and fundamentalist.

A separate [report to a government inquiry](#) directly tied such reporting to an increase in anti-Muslim hate crimes.

Let's be clear. I am the dean of a journalism school that bears the name of the patron saint of the American news media, Edward R. Murrow. I have been a reporter for four decades. A commitment to press freedom is in my blood.

I have also seen the handiwork of Islamist extremists up close and personal. I saw bits of U.S. Marines hanging from trees after their Beirut headquarters was obliterated by a truck bomb. I have known journalists who were kidnapped and diplomats who were murdered and I have covered more acts of terrorism in more countries than I can begin to count. That shapes how I view the Islamist fringe.

But, as I wrote in a 2012 [*Columbia Journalism Review* column](#), journalism is not supposed to be a weapon. The goal is to inform, not inflame; to understand, not distort. Isn't that what separates it from propaganda?

Back in 2006, after the frenzy over the publication of an earlier set of [*cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad*](#) by a Danish newspaper (see Chapter One) many Muslim journalists simply couldn't understand why Western news organizations would republish the offensive images just because they had the legal right to do so.

"When I insult your religion or your feelings, it is crossing the limits of freedom of expression," Egyptian columnist Salama Ahmed Salama told me at the time. Many Muslims had a similar reaction to the 2012 *Newsweek* "Muslim Rage" cover (see Chapter Five).

"There is a great and perhaps decisive battle to be fought against ignorance, intolerance and indifference," Edward R. Murrow said back

in 1958. “This weapon of television could be useful.” The words apply equally in today’s multi-media world.

To provide the kind of background and context that, we hope, will help general assignment reporters in large cities and small towns produce fair, balanced and informed reporting about Islam on Main Street USA, we assembled a team that includes noted academic experts on specific aspects of Islam who worked with us to present their academic knowledge in a format accessible to work-a-day reporters. We also roped in a few journalists who know the subject intimately. The project was supported by the Carnegie Corporation of New York through a program run by the Social Science Research Council to bring academic expertise on Islam into the public sphere.

We hope you find it useful. All of the images used here are from actual reporting and most link back to the original story (if still live). We leave it to you to decide which are sensitive, which are straightforward, which reinforce stereotypes, and which are just plain offensive.

Lawrence Pintak

Founding Dean

The Edward R. Murrow College of Communication

Washington State University

CHAPTER ONE

Islam 101

Just the Facts

By Lawrence Pintak



A REPORTER writing about the Muslim residents of his/her community does not need to be an expert on Islam, but s/he does need to know enough to ask intelligent questions, avoid mistakes and steer clear of stereotypes that might unintentionally give offense.

Some basic facts can be found below, along with links to sources that provide more background.

Fact #1: Islam is a religion, a culture, and a way of life

WHAT is Islam? Most of us think of it as a religion, but it is also a culture and a way of life. The word “Islam” roughly translates as “surrender” or “submission.” Muslims surrender themselves to the will of Allah. The word “Muslim” is the active form of “Islam,” and means “I surrender” (“Allah,” BTW, is just the Arabic translation

of “God,” not a separate deity. Some Arab Christians also use Allah when referring to God).

While we’re on definitions, the community of Muslims is the *ummah*. This can refer to the global community of Muslims or the specific group that worships in your local mosque, or house of worship. You may hear some Muslims refer to the mosque by another name: *masjid*. This Arabic word literally means place of prostration and is probably the root of the English word mosque.

Fact #2: Islam is the fastest growing religion in the U.S.

THERE are about 1.6 billion Muslims in the world — a bit less than a quarter of the world’s population; that will rise to about 2.2 billion by 2030 (though the rate of growth is decreasing and the percentage of overall population will only increase slightly). About 60 percent of the world’s Muslims are under 30 years old.

A 2011 [Pew report](#) estimated that the number of Muslims in the U.S. will more than double by 2030, from 2.6 million to 6.2 million, much of that through conversion and immigration, meaning the country will have roughly the same number of Muslims and Jews.

Not every Muslim speaks Arabic. Far from it. Though we tend to associate Islam most directly with the Arab world, less than 15 percent of Muslims are Arab. The reality is that there are more Muslims in Indonesia alone than in the entire Arab world and Muslims are the majority in more than 50 countries. Aside from Indonesia,

the countries with the largest Muslim populations include Pakistan (137 million), Bangladesh (115 million), India (107 million, though Muslims are not the majority), Iran (64 million), Turkey (61 million), and Egypt (52 million).

In the U.S., only about a quarter of the Arab population is Muslim; the rest are Christian, confounding most stereotypes.

Fact #3: Arabic is the language of the Qur'an

ARABIC does exert a strong influence on the religion since the Qur'an (Koran) was first transcribed in classical Arabic (more on that later) and, even though it has been translated into countless languages, only the original Arabic is considered authentic when it comes to matters of the rules governing Muslim life. For that reason, many non-Arab Muslims learn some basic Arabic so that they can read the Qur'an — or at least they learn to recite it by rote. Qur'an recitation contests in Arabic are popular among young Muslims around the world.

Fact #4: Islam is a “revealed” or “prophetic” religion

ISLAM is a “revealed” religion, in the tradition of the biblical prophets. Muslims believe that the Qur'an was transmitted to the Prophet Mohammed by the Angel Gabriel during meditation sessions in a cave outside Mecca in what is now Saudi Arabia.

Qur'an literally means “The Work.” It represents the words of Allah as

revealed to Mohammed. This is an important distinction from the Bible, which is a gathering of accounts of events. The Qur'an is said to be God's own words, not the teaching of the Angel Gabriel or Mohammed.

To get a little more esoteric, the Qur'an is considered to be the earthly manifestation of an "Uncreated" Qur'an that exists in Heaven, in roughly the same way that Christians consider Jesus to be the human incarnation of God. That original transmission occurred in Arabic, which is why translations of the Qur'an are considered mere interpretations, not Allah's exact words. Debates over which of the many translations of the Bible is most accurate underline the reason for this insistence on adhering to Arabic.

An example of how easily things can change in translation can be seen on a site run by the [University of Southern California](#) that provides language from three different translations of the Qur'an for each passage. Compare, for example, this verse from *Surah 32, As-Sajda*, in English translations by Abdullah Yusufali, M.M. Pickthal, and Muhammed Habib Shakir:

YUSUFALI: He Who has made everything which He has created most good: He began the creation of man with (nothing more than) clay ...

PICKTHAL: Who made all things good which He created, and He began the creation of man from clay ...

SHAKIR: Who made good everything that He has created, and He began the creation of man from dust ...

And another example from *Surah 17, Al-Isra*:

YUSUFALI: See how We have bestowed more on some than on others; but verily the Hereafter is more in rank and gradation and more in excellence.

PICKTHAL: See how We prefer one of them above another, and verily the Hereafter will be greater in degrees and greater in preferment.

SHAKIR: See how We have made some of them to excel others, and certainly the hereafter is much superior in respect of excellence.

Fact #5: Muslims recognize the teachings of Christianity and Judaism

THE teachings of Islam recognize many of the Jewish and Christian prophets just as they recognize the validity of the Torah and the Bible and the “sheets” or commands given Moses. “It was We who revealed the law [to Moses],” Allah tells Muhammad in the revelations (Qur’an 5:47–8), “And verily We have written in the Psalms” (Qur’an 21:105).

This is important. The Qur’an was revealed to Muhammad, Muslims believe, because those previous messages from God were, Muslims believe, corrupted in their retelling through the centuries. That is why Muslims are so adamant that only the Qur’an in its original Arabic is truly authentic.

Christians and Jews are called the “People of the Book.” Adam,

Noah, Moses, and John the Baptist are just some of the 25 prophets mentioned in the Qur'an. Even Solomon, the biblical King of the Israel, known to Muslims as Sulayman, is recognized as a messenger of God. In the Revelations transcribed in the Qur'an, Allah tells Muhammad:

We sent messengers before you: there are some of them that We have mentioned to you and there are others whom We have not mentioned to you. (Qur'an 40:78)

and

To every people [was sent] an apostle. (Qur'an 10:47)

At one point, Allah, through the Angel Gabriel, commands Muhammad to repeat:

We believe in Allah and what has been revealed to us, and what was revealed to Ibrahim [Abraham] and Ismail and Ishaq [Isaac] and Yaqoub [Jacob] and the tribes, and what was given to Musa [Moses] and Isa [Jesus] and to the prophets from their Lord; we do not make any distinction between any of them, and to Him do we submit. (Qur'an 3:084)

While Muslims do not recognize Jesus as the Son of God, he is revered as a prophet sent “as a Sign unto men and a Mercy from Us” (19:21). His mother, Mary, also holds a special place in Islam. “Behold! The angels said: ‘O Mary! Allah hath chosen thee and purified thee — chosen thee above the women of all nations’” (3:42).

Most of the key beliefs of Muslims have strong parallels in Christianity and Judaism:

Belief in the Oneness of God

Belief in Angels

Belief in a set of holy scriptures

Belief in the prophets and messengers of God to whom the scriptures were revealed

Belief in a Day of Judgment

Belief in God's divine will

Fact #6: Muhammad was not divine

SO who was Muhammad? First, and perhaps most importantly, Muhammad is not the Muslim equivalent of Jesus. He is not considered to be divine and is not seen by Muslims to be the Son of Allah, as Christians believe Christ is the Son of God. He is a prophet or messenger who was the vessel through which God's message was revealed. What makes him different from previous prophets, according to Muslims, is that he was the "final" prophet, which is why he is called "the Seal of the Prophets."

And although he is not divine, he is considered "the Perfect Man." By imitating him, Muslims hope to acquire his interior attitude — perfect surrender to God.

(BTW: You have probably seen the Prophet's name spelled many different ways. All are correct; this is an issue of the transliteration from Arabic. The most widely accepted spelling is Muhammad, but what you use will depend on your news organization's house style.)

The Prophet Muhammad was a simple trader before the revelations began. He was born in about A.D. 570 into the Quraish tribe that dominated the desert town of Mecca or *Makkah*.

As many in the West know, Mecca is today the most holy city in Islam. Muslims around the world face Mecca when they pray. All Muslims who can afford it are required to make the pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in their lives. As part of the pilgrimage, Muslims circle the Kaaba, the black square structure in the center of the main mosque, which all Muslims face in prayer. Muslims believe it was constructed by the prophet Abraham and his son Ishmael 4,000 years ago on the site of a sanctuary said to have been established by Adam, the first man. It contains a black stone believed to have come from heaven. Back then, it was also a pilgrimage site. The difference was that pilgrims in those days were worshipping a pantheon of local gods, of whom Allah was just one among many. Muhammad's tribe, the Quraish were the guardians of the Kaaba.

Muhammad was orphaned at an early age and raised by his grandfather, and then by his uncle. As a child, he was a shepherd, tending his uncle's flocks. He is described as pensive and sensitive; when he was older he became a trader respected for his honesty and wisdom. But, it is said, he could neither read nor write.

A pivotal point in his life came when he led a caravan to Syria for a wealthy widow. There are tales of miraculous events during the trip, which was profitable. So pleased was the widow, Khadijah, that she decided to marry Muhammad, even though she was 15 years older than he.

Fact #7: Muslims believe the Qur'an came to Muhammad in meditation

MUHAMMAD frequently retreated to the caves of Mt. Hira to meditate. In A.D. 610, on what is now called the “Night of Power” (during what is now the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan), Muslims believe the Angel Gabriel appeared to him and ordered, “Proclaim!” (also translated as “Read!” or “Write!”).

This was the beginning of the Revelation of what would become the Qur'an. The transmission would continue for 23 years. But in that first otherworldly encounter, Gabriel is said to have taught him a verse (Qur'an, *Surah* 96, Verse 01):

Proclaim in the name of thy Lord who created,
Created man, out of a clot of congealed blood.
Proclaim! And thy Lord is most Bountiful,
He who taught (the use of) the Pen,
Taught man that which he knew not.

At first, Muhammad didn't know what to make of it. It might just be his imagination or, if it was some kind of spirit talking to him, how could he be sure it could be trusted? Remember, the desert tribesmen in those days believed in a whole array of *jinn*s, or desert spirits, some of which were good and others bad.

His wife Khadijah convinced him it was the Word of God, which is why she is considered the first Muslim — or first to surrender to Allah.

Fact #8: Allah was just one of many gods worshipped by Muhammad's tribe

AS mentioned above, the seventh-century Meccans worshipped a pantheon of gods or desert *jinn*s. Among those was a deity called Allah who was considered among the more powerful. As in Greek and Roman mythology, each of these gods had specific duties. Allah was considered to be the creator of humankind and determiner of human destiny.

Some Meccans worshipped Allah exclusively, even though they recognized the presence of the other gods. These Meccans were called *hanifs*. Muhammad was a *hanif*. So when he was meditating in that cave, it was Allah he was contemplating.

The first words of the Islamic call to prayer are: *Ashhadu alla ilaha illa Allah!* (There is no god but God!). In the abstract, that seems self-evident. But basically what Muslims believe Allah was telling Muhammad was, forget about all these other gods, they're just desert spirits; I'm the only God with a capital "G".

Fact #9: The concept of a single God is the foundation of Islam

MUSLIMS use the word *tawhid* to describe the unity of God. As the noted Pakistani Islamist thinker Syed Abul A'ala Maududi wrote in his classic work *Towards and Understanding of Islam*.

The more a man increases his knowledge, the greater becomes his dissatisfaction with the multiplicity of deities. So the number of minor deities begins to decrease. More enlightened men bring each one of them under the searchlight of scrutiny and ultimately find that none of these man-made deities has any divine character; they themselves are creatures like man, though rather more helpless. They are thus eliminated one by one until only one God remains.

The concept of *tawhid* is the bedrock upon which Islam rests. Islam shares with Christianity and Judaism another fundamental belief: that there will be a day of judgment and resurrection.

Fact #10: There are five “pillars” of Islam

THE five pillars of Islam are the commitments Muslims make to their religion. These include:

1. To bear witness to the faith by reciting the *Shihada*:

Ashhadu alla ilaha illa Allah wa ashhadu anna Muhammad rasulu Allah [I witness, there is no god but Allah and I witness, Muhammad is the messenger of Allah].

2. To pray five times a day, prostrating toward Mecca and touching head to ground, to dispel arrogance and promote humility.

God is most great, God is most great, God is most great, God is most great, I witness that there is no god but God; I witness

that there is no god but God. I witness that Muhammad is the messenger of God. I witness that Muhammad is the messenger of God. Come to prayer; come to prayer! Come to prosperity; come to prosperity! God is most great. God is most great. There is no god but God.

3. To give portion of income as a tax (*zakat*) and one-fifth of income to the poor (*khoums*), based on belief a society cannot be pure if there is misery.
4. To fast during the month of Ramadan, to cleanse and experience the suffering of the poor.
5. To make pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in lifetime, for those who can afford it. This is known as the *Hajj*.

Fact #11: Anyone may convert to Islam

ONE needs only to recite the *Shihada*, “There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah,” three times in front of witnesses.

Fact #12: The teachings that govern Islam are called sharia

BY this point, most Americans have heard some reference to *sharia* law. Some reporters may even have written stories about a movement in the U.S. dedicated to fighting what its members claim is the

encroachment of *sharia* — or Islamic — law in this country.

Sharia literally means the Straight Path. At some level, *sharia* governs every aspect of Muslim life. But the proviso “at some level” is important, because, just as some Catholics might ignore strictures on birth control and some Jews eat pork, Muslims also sometimes veer off “the straight path” in violation of *sharia*.

In countries governed by strict adherence to Islam, such as Iran and Saudi Arabia, *sharia* is the law of the land. But in many other Muslim countries, such as Egypt, there are separate civil and *sharia* law courts, with the latter governing issues such as marriage and family law, while civil courts decide the rest.

There are five main sources for *sharia* law:

- The Qur’an
- The *Sunnah*: Oral history of the Prophet
- The *hadith*: The Prophet Mohammed’s sayings and teachings
- Legal opinions that arise from consensus among Qur’anic scholars
- Legal analogies based on the Qur’an and *hadith*

Just as the New Testament of the Bible consists of accounts of the life of Jesus Christ, the *hadith* is a compilation of the sayings and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, while the *Sunnah* is an oral history by those around him. These consist of thousands of accounts documented and reconstructed by Islamic scholars through the centuries. These accounts are only considered authentic if the scholars have traced an uninterrupted chain of connection to the family or entourage of the Prophet.

The legal opinions are the work of Islamic scholars through the centuries, while the analogies represent the effort by Islamic scholars to apply the lessons of Muhammad's age to modern events and issues.

*Fact #13: Muhammad was not popular
with his tribe's leadership*

ONCE he started telling people about the Revelations he was receiving, Muhammad's preaching angered the leadership of Mecca. After all, Mecca's economy depended on pilgrims coming to worship the desert deities said to inhabit the Kaaba. By telling people not to worship these idols he threatened the core of his fellow tribesmen's belief system, their power (protection of holy places), and their pocketbooks.

Things eventually became very uncomfortable for Muhammad and his followers. Verbal attacks became physical and the persecution increased. Eventually, the people of a neighboring desert town, Yatrib, offered him refuge. He traveled there with his followers in 622. This is known to Muslims as the *Hijira* and is the start of the Muslim calendar, marked by the sighting of the crescent moon (A.D. 2013 is 1430 A.H., Anno Hegira, Year of the *Hijira*).

Today, Muslims interpret Muhammad's decision to embark on this exodus as a teaching that they should not live under tyranny.

Yatrib would eventually be renamed Medina and is today considered the second most holy city in Islam. It was in Medina that the

first real community governed by the strictures laid out in the Qur'an was formed and the first mosque was built. The overriding teaching governing life in Mecca was that everyone — and everything — is sacred in the eyes of God: “No creature is there crawling on the earth, no bird flying with its wings, but they are nations like yourselves” (*Surah* 6: verse 38).

The skirmishing with Mecca continued and two years after moving to Medina, Muhammad and a small band of followers attacked an important Meccan caravan. Their victory was seen as confirmation of the righteousness of their cause. In response, the Quraish laid siege to Medina. Eventually, they reached a truce and, in 629, Muhammad returned to Mecca as a pilgrim. But during the trip, one of his followers was murdered and Muhammad decreed that the Quraish had broken the truce. He gathered a huge army and led a “defensive” assault on Mecca. Eventually, the city surrendered and it became Muhammad’s capital.

Within a decade, almost all the tribes of Arabia had converted to Islam. Within a century, the Islamic empire was larger than that of Rome at its height, encompassing the Middle East, North Africa, and Spain in West, and India and Central Asia in East.

Fact #14: There is no Muslim pope

THE two main branches of Islam are the Sunnis and the Shiites. The main reason for the split can be traced back to a dispute over who should inherit leadership after Muhammad’s death. The Sunnis

said the Caliph, or leader, should be elected. Those who became the Shiites argued it should follow Muhammad's bloodline (more on this, and their doctrinal differences, in Chapter 3).

The majority of Muslims are Sunnis. Since the collapse of the caliphate (see Chapter 4), the Sunnis have had no single figure of authority. There are several highly respected centers of Islamic scholarship, most notably Al Azhar University in Cairo, but no single religious figure is pre-eminent. This is one reason why we hear about so many conflicting *fatwas*, or religious rulings, emerging from the Muslim world.

The Shiites do have something more akin to the Vatican hierarchy with their structure of Ayatollahs. The Grand Ayatollah Khomeini was the dominant religious authority of his time. But the majority Sunnis do not recognize the authority of the Shiite clergy.

Fact #15: Images of Muhammad are forbidden

THE first thing a Christian or Jew entering a mosque is likely to notice is the fact that it is basically empty. There are no pictures on the walls, no statues, not even an altar; just an empty room with carpets on the floor and a depression (*qiblah*) in the wall at one end to denote the direction of Mecca.

The reason for the absence of artwork can be traced back to Allah's command that the Meccans stop worshipping idols. Even images of Muhammad are still forbidden to ensure he is not deified. In fact, members

of Saudi Arabia's fundamentalist Wahhabi sect actually destroyed all evidence of his tomb to ensure it did not become a place of pilgrimage.

The Shiites do sometimes use images of Imam Hussein and Imam Ali, the founders of Shi'ism, but even then the faces are sometimes obscured, as in the image at right.

Members of the Sufi branch

of Islam, a mystical philosophy best known in the West through the writings of Rumi, do depict and revere their saints, which is one reason they are banned in Saudi Arabia.

All of this is why the publication of cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad in Western newspapers in 2005–6 was so offensive to Muslims (for more on the controversy, see [Columbia University's case study](#)).



Reporter's Notebook: Covering Islam in America

By Andrea Elliott

The New York Times

An Imam in America

A Calling Beyond Brooklyn

Part 1: A Muslim Leader in Brooklyn, Reconciling 2 Worlds (March 5, 2006)

Part 3: Tending to Muslim Hearts and Islam's Future (March 7, 2006)

Part 4: A Cleric's Journey Leads to a Suburban Frontier

Multimedia



Interactive Feature

DUSTY packets of curry. That was my first clue that a major story had been hiding in plain sight.

It was May of 2003, and I had been sent out on a daily assignment by the National Desk of *The New York Times*. My mandate was to capture, in 500 words, the impact of a new counter-terrorism program on American Muslims. In the wake of 9/11, the media's gaze had been elsewhere. Much of the coverage focused on two groups: the victims and the perpetrators. But little was known about America's millions of Muslim bystanders, and if this federal program was any indica-

tion, their lives had been upended. Muslim immigrant men were being summoned to government offices to register their fingerprints and other biographical data, and thousands had complied, only to be deported.

Not knowing where to go that day, I headed to the Brooklyn neighborhood known as "Little Pakistan." Signs of distress were everywhere.

Countless families had packed up and left, the owner of a Pakistani deli told me, pointing to the untouched curry packets. Attendance at a mosque down the street had dropped by half. Businesses were shuttered and the neighborhood's elementary school was losing its Urdu-speaking students. When I asked a local activist to describe how 9/11 had changed his community, he reached for a thick volume of anonymous, handwritten accounts by Muslims chronicling hate crimes and job discrimination, fear and isolation.

I sat silently in his office, absorbing page after page of this hidden oral history. It called for so much more than a daily assignment, I thought. It was a beat. My editors agreed and I was soon combing the city in search of stories about Islam in a post-9/11 America. There was no shortage of leads, but I quickly hit a wall. Muslims did not trust the media. In headlines, "Islam" and "terrorism" shared space, as if the two were synonymous. As the public's perception of Islam worsened, Muslims blamed the press. The irony was not lost on me: I was trying to write about a backlash against Muslims that my own profession stood accused of fueling.

For every ten doors I knocked on, I was lucky if one opened. I began referring to my job as the "no-one-will-talk-to-me beat." I was sure that it hindered me to be such an obvious outsider — a non-Arabic speaking, Catholic-raised westerner. But in time, I came to see that my apartness actually helped. As an outsider, I was asking questions that weren't typically asked, like how it felt to ride the bus wearing a headscarf. My presence, however jolting, was an invitation

to air grievances, to crack jokes, to enlighten an eager listener. I kept saying, “Help me understand,” and that resonated with people, because they yearned to be understood.

Admittedly, I had a lot to learn. The media’s study of Islam largely began on 9/11 as a frenzied crash course. Reporters were scrambling to make sense of the attacks, and a fringe interpretation of Islam was at the center of the story. Never mind that this complicated, sprawling, 14-centuries old religion is not a subject that can be learned on deadline. The press lacked even the most basic guidance. If an unarmed black teenager is shot dead, Al Sharpton’s phone starts to ring. But there was no obvious spokesperson for America’s Muslims, who were divided along lines of class, race, and national origin. Reporters turned to a random assortment of self-appointed “experts” whose legitimacy could not be easily vetted. They fell into one of two camps: the critics and the cheerleaders. One group blamed the religion for the attacks, while the other repeated mantras like “Islam is peace” and “Our faith has been hijacked.” It was as if they were describing two different religions.

Reporters also fell prey to reductionism. We repeated the same imprecise and shallow descriptions, like “firebrand” and “moderate.” Muslims were commonly written about as the other, as the unfamiliar and — by inference — untrustworthy aliens among us. When we write about Hispanic Catholics, it’s rare to find a story that describes them praying to Dios. Yet in stories about Muslims, reporters kept using the word Allah, as if their God was a different one. In my first

stories, I reflexively described the *hijabs* of my female Muslim subjects until it dawned on me that this was no different than always describing non-Muslim women by their hairstyles.

Looking back, that period seems very distant now. The media's coverage of Islam has evolved into a deeper narrative, just as Muslims have coalesced into a more organized and press-savvy community, determined to reclaim their image. But after almost a decade of reporting on Islam in America, I would argue that the lessons I learned in the beginning still apply today.

Getting inside a mosque, an Islamic school or the home of a newly arrived immigrant family presents big hurdles. It's essential to have a conduit — a trusted figure in the community who will vouch for you and your work, and even accompany you on your first round of reporting. Cultivating that kind of source in and of itself requires some serious reporting. When I was writing about Somalis in Minneapolis, it became crucial to understand the intricate clan divisions within the community, as each faction answered to a different elder. Reporters tend to go first to the imam, but Muslim leaders come in many forms: they are lawyers, activists, Islamic school principals, business-owners, and bloggers. Covering a mosque is not too different from covering city hall. You need to identify the true gatekeepers, because the trustees may be less plugged in than the low-ranking volunteer who waters the plants.

Once your conduit has cleared the way, you need to do another thing that is as old as reporting itself: show up. If there is one thing I hope you take away from this, it is that. No amount of networking,

cajoling, clip-sending or working the phones will get you inside these communities faster than your daily presence. With each visit, I found that the barriers of suspicion dissolved a bit more. I went from being “that reporter” to a familiar face whose interest was not fleeting, but sincere. I learned to let interviews work more like conversations. If I revealed a little about myself — my upbringing, my home life — it put people at ease.

It’s important to show fluency in the cultural norms that define life for many Muslims. I never waited for a prompt to remove my shoes before entering a person’s home. When being introduced to men, I waited to see if they extended a hand in the event that they were not comfortable with handshakes. I always carried a headscarf in my bag, just in case I needed to step into the worship area of a mosque. These small signs of respect go a long way.

No matter how much of an outsider you are, you can always find universal points of connection with your subjects. And when all else fails, eat with them. Nothing helps more to break the ice than breaking bread.



The Many Faces of Islam

Cultural Unity and Diversity in the Muslim World

By Robert W. Hefner



MANY Western observers assume that Islam is primarily an Arab and Middle Eastern religion. It is true that the first community of Muslims originated in Arabia, and the Qur'an, the *hadith* (the canonical actions and statements of the Prophet Muhammad, the second of Islam's scriptural sources), and much classical religious scholarship are written in Arabic.

Across the Islamic world, too, Muslims perform their daily prayers in Arabic, and face Mecca as Arab Muslims do. The study of classical Arabic remains at the heart of religious learning to this day.

Although Arab history and language have a special place in Islamic civilization, the fact remains that ethnic Arabs today constitute only about 20 percent of the global Muslim population of 1.7 billion. The greatest concentration of Muslims is found, not in the Middle

East, but in South Asia (Pakistan, India, Bangladesh), home to a half-billion Muslims.

Almost two-thirds of the world's Muslims live in Asia. With its 255 million citizens, 88 percent of whom are Muslim, the Southeast Asian nation of Indonesia is the largest Muslim-majority country in the world. No less striking, the world's Muslim population is today experiencing its fastest growth in sub-Saharan Africa and Western Europe.

Islam's great territorial expanse is not a new phenomenon

FROM its third century onward, Muslim civilization has been the most globalized and racially diverse of world religions. Whereas, demographically speaking, Christianity in 1800 was still an overwhelmingly Western religion, Islam had long been established over a territorial expanse stretching from Morocco and Nigeria in the west to Kazakhstan, the southern Philippines, and Indonesia in the east.

In the course of its historic expansion, Islam was accommodated to a diverse variety of languages, cultures, and political traditions. The process of accommodation continues even today, and sometimes assumes unexpected forms. For example, today the most widely used language for Islamic books and Internet discussion is no longer Arabic, but English.

What do Muslims share amidst their cultural diversity?

ONE of the questions that academic specialists of Islam have long explored is: inasmuch as Islam spread over such a vast linguistic and cultural expanse, what held the community of Muslims together? After all, Islam has no pope, and it lacks the centralized ecclesiastical structure (a “church”) that undergirded religious organization in Western and Eastern Christianity. Even with its centralized church structure, Christianity experienced schisms far more regularly than did Islam. Today Islam can be broadly divided into two doctrinal communities: the *Sunni* (roughly 85 percent of the global population) and the *Shia* (around 14 percent).

There are also some smaller, non-conformist varieties of Islam, like the Alevis of Turkey, whom many mainstream Muslims regard as heretical. Nonetheless, by comparison with the hundreds of different Churches in post-Reformation Europe, Islam has managed to maintain an astonishing measure of cohesion even as it has accommodated diverse peoples and cultures.

How have Muslims maintained unity amidst their cultural diversity?

SOME commentators have speculated that that it was the close alliance of religious and state authority seen in the early centuries of

Islam that ensured the religion's cohesion. However, from the ninth century on, the centralized state authority known as the caliphate had ceased to function as the real political authority in most Muslim lands, and power was dispersed across an assortment of regional sultans, kings, and rulers.

Although empires like those of the Ottomans (14th to 20th century) in the eastern Mediterranean and the Mughals (16th to 19th century) in India managed to control great swaths of territory, they never administered more than a small portion of the total Muslim world.

The forces that unite Muslims

RATHER than a central polity, then, the key to Muslim unity lay in the religion's unstinting emphasis on three core convictions: first, the absolute sanctity of the Qur'an and the canonical sayings and actions of the Prophet (as recorded in *hadith* and known collectively as *Sunnah*); second, the requirement that all believers fulfill the Five Pillars of Islam (the profession of the faith, the five daily prayers, the annual fast, the provision of alms for the poor, and pilgrimage to Mecca for those of sufficient means); and, third, the idea that leadership in religious affairs should be in the hands, not of politicians, but of religious scholars, the *ulama*. The *ulama* come to prominence as a result of their studies in *madrassas*, religious schools dedicated to the study of classical religious learning.

This last trait is particularly important for understanding Islam's civilizational cohesion. The study and transmission of religious knowledge (*ilm*) have always been at the heart of Islamic tradition. Islam is a religion of the Book and of religious commentary, and most Muslims regard religious study as a form of worship in its own right.

In principle, every Muslim is enjoined to acquire a basic knowledge of God's words and injunctions. From the earliest times, however, Muslims have recognized that those who devote their lives to the study of God's commandments are best qualified to exercise authority on matters of religion (but not politics). The centrality of the religious scholars and their associated institution, the *madrassa*, also helped to keep religious law, the *sharia*, at the center of Islamic life.

Since its creation in eastern Iran in the 10th century, the *madrassa* has provided the foundation for a trans-regional Islamic culture, one centered on the commitment to the upholding of divine law.

The diversity of religious expression

WHATEVER its success at maintaining these core religious convictions, Islam has always had other religious streams in addition to the *madrassa*-based legal tradition. In pre-modern times as well as today, many Muslims believed that there is more to the experience of the divine than knowledge of and conformity to God's law. For some believers, an equally important aspect of Islamic experience was and is the mystical experience of God's presence.

Still today this emphasis, sometimes called “illuminationist,” informs the way many Muslims profess their faith. The current is widespread, but it assumes its most vivid expression in the religious orders known collectively as Sufism.

Although today most Sufis are keen to demonstrate their fidelity to *sharia* law, Sufism has for many Muslims been an important complement to the more formalistic emphases of Islamic law. In pre-modern times, Sufi masters and their disciples played a central role in the dissemination of Islam to new frontier lands, in places as varied as India, Senegal, Indonesia, and Kazakhstan. Sufi missionaries proved especially effective because they were often more willing than scholars of the law to tolerate a variety of devotional practices that appealed to ordinary Muslims. These popular practices included the veneration of saints (as in Western Catholicism, saints are thought capable of helping the living), the mystical chanting of God’s names, the use of music in religious festivals, and a host of other popular practices that make religion a deeply emotional as well as a moral experience.

In modern times, puritanical Muslims associated with groups like the modern Saudi-influenced movement known as Salafism have come to regard many Sufi practices as heretical, and they have sought to restrict or even abolish Sufi practices. In Pakistan in recent years, militant Salafis have made Sufis the targets of deadly attacks. Many specialists of Islam have seen actions like these as evidence that Sufism in the modern world is bound to decline or even disappear. Although the Sufi stream

in Muslim civilization has diminished compared to what it was several centuries ago, it remains strong in many Muslim lands.

In fact, recent years have witnessed a neo-Sufi revival in countries as varied as Senegal, Morocco, Syria, India, and Indonesia. This new variety of Sufism is centered, not among the peasantry and urban poor, but among an educated middle class interested in professing their faith in a deeply personal and experiential way.

Women and Islam: no single model

NOTWITHSTANDING media images to the contrary, the identity and status of women in the Muslim world varies greatly. Gender is a matter of great importance in all Muslim-majority societies, but it matters in complex and contextually variable ways.

Islamic law has had one important influence on Muslim attitudes toward gender issues and women. The status of women in the *sharia* was handled primarily through family law, especially that dealing with matters of marriage, divorce, property, and inheritance, as well as modesty and sexual decorum. With regard to property in marriage, the *sharia* gives women fuller rights than they are thought to have enjoyed in pre-Islamic Arabia. In general, too their rights are greater than those enjoyed by women in medieval Europe.

But on a number of key issues Islamic law puts women at a serious disadvantage relative to men. According to classical understandings of the law, women's testimony in religious courts counts as just

half that of men. A woman's right to initiate divorce is also severely restricted compared to her husband's. A girl's inherited share of her parents' properties is one-half her brother's.

Most troubling for Muslim proponents of modern citizenship, classical jurisprudence stipulates that in both domestic and public affairs women are not to exercise authority over men. Citing verse 4:34 of the Qur'an, traditionalist rulings assign men guardianship (*qawama*) over women. Conservative commentators go further, severely limiting the rights of women to appear in public or anywhere where they might risk associating with men.

In practice, the actions and rulings of the judges (*qadi*) who serve in religious courts are often more flexible than these legal provisions imply. Court proceedings tend to be informed as much by local notions of gender and fairness as much as they are by the terms of classical jurisprudence.

In this way, court practices reflect the variation seen in the status of women around the Muslim world. For example, in West Africa, Turkish-speaking areas of West and Central Asia, and Muslim Southeast Asia, women have long played a prominent public role in the marketplace; they also manage household finances, and often play as active a role as men in choosing their marriage partner.

In these areas too, the tradition of adult women's seclusion (*purdah*) — still practiced in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and some regions of the Arab Middle East — is either unknown or restricted to a small number of conservative religious elites. In many of these lat-

ter settings, the tradition of women's seclusion has more to do with traditional notions of honor, hierarchy, and male supremacy than it does Islamic law.

The impact of greater piety and social changes in the Muslim world

IN the 1970s and 1980s, much of the Muslim world experienced an unprecedented resurgence in religious piety, and this too affected Muslim women. The influences on this development were not just religious; the resurgence occurred in the aftermath of social and cultural transformations of a largely secular nature.

Urbanization, migration, and growing socioeconomic differentiation combined to undermine received social authorities. The state's inability to meet all but a portion of the needs of the new urban masses also created a demand for alternative providers of public services in the fields of health, education, and public security.

Mass education, literacy, and a growing network of mosques and Islamic schools combined to strengthen the determination of ordinary Muslims to take charge of their faith. Together, these social forces generated a great popular appetite for a more active participation in religious life.

Less often remarked, but equally important, a gender transition took place in many Muslim lands during these same years. The gender transition was the result of several influences, including urbanization

and, above all else, the movement of girls into education. The latter process had begun under the auspices of newly independent governments in the 1950s and 1960s. By the late 1970s and early 1980s, the process had given rise to an equally unprecedented movement of young women into secondary and tertiary education.

In many countries, by the mid-1990s, the percentage of women in higher education rivaled or (as in Egypt and Malaysia) exceeded that of men. There were national exceptions to these trends: girls in Afghanistan and Pakistan continue to lag far behind boys in educational achievement, and they are often subject to severe social restrictions. But the general pattern across the broader Muslim world today is clear: heightened education and social mobility have created a new generation of women eager to participate in modern public life.

The coincidence of these two developments — the Islamic resurgence and a shift in women's aspirations — means that questions of women and Islam have moved to the center of public debate in Muslim societies, sometimes becoming bitter points of contention.

How should Muslim women dress?

WOMEN'S dress has been one of the most important sites of this argument. Although the veiling of women was common in many parts of the early 20th-century Muslim world, it was far from universal.

Headscarves were common enough around the Arab world, particularly among women of the more elevated classes. But Muslim

women in much of Africa, Central Asia, and Southeast Asia regarded a simple, loose-fitting headscarf as more than sufficient for the purposes of personal modesty. During the middle decades of the 20th century, secular nationalists in many countries encouraged the adoption of an even less obtrusive headscarf.

As in Turkey in the 1920s and Indonesia in the 1950s, some secular nationalist political leaders even recommended no head covering at all. With urbanization and mass education in the 1960s and 1970s, growing numbers of women were also invited out of the home and into the labor force.

The Islamic resurgence had an ambiguous impact on this gender transition. Many pious women began to wear more encompassing veils, covering, not only the hair and the neck below the chin, but the shoulders and chest as well. The headscarf was embraced by growing numbers of women even in countries like Indonesia and Turkey where, prior to the resurgence, only a minority had veiled themselves.

But many women adapted the headscarf to a more personally expressive style, using fine silks and bright colors to create a scarf both modest and fashionable. In this and other ways, the forms and meanings of the headscarf have become matters of intense public debate and social variation.

In some countries, conservative activists promote the headscarf as part of a larger process of segregating men from women, and ensuring the authority of fathers and husbands over daughters and wives. By contrast, however, many independent-minded women see

the headscarf as a vehicle of social empowerment, one allowing them to participate more fully in public life without fear of being accused of moral impropriety.

Female Muslim leaders

SINCE the 1980s, Muslim women have assumed positions of national leadership at a rate comparable to or even higher than that of women in Western Europe or, especially, the United States. Women presidents or prime ministers have been elected in Turkey, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Indonesia. The women who have assumed these roles have typically done so in the face of opposition from Salafis and other conservative Islamists. Nonetheless, women were central players in the student-activist groups that helped to overthrow Indonesia's President Suharto in May 1998. Women were also active in the grass-roots organizations that helped to catapult moderate Islamist parties to electoral victory in Turkey in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

Women also played a central role in Iran's Islamic revolution in 1979, as well as the green movement pressing for reform in Iran today. Religious conservatives in many countries sometimes condemn women's activism as un-Islamic. But other Muslims insist that there is nothing impious about women playing prominent public roles. As these examples hint, gender relations are changing rapidly in the Muslim world, and are likely to remain a key feature of public discussion for many years to come.

Islam, capitalism, and economic globalization

ANOTHER matter on which Muslim societies show significant cultural variation concerns their engagement with market capitalism and new, globalized forms of consumption. The growth of capitalism in the 19th and 20th century, and the spread of neoliberal market reforms in the 1990s, presented a severe challenge to the once proud countries of the Muslim world.

In the middle decades of the 20th century, large numbers of Muslim politicians and intellectuals responded by advocating what they called “Islamic socialism.” This was a variety of economics that combined elements from Islamic tradition with ideas drawn from social and Christian democracy in the West.

In the 1980s and 1990s, however, socialism fell out of fashion in much of the Muslim world, as it did in many other countries. Another stream in the Muslim community emphasized that the Prophet Muhammad and his first wife were merchants, and of all the major world religions, Islam is arguably the most commerce friendly.

In recent years, this market-based view has become the dominant one in most Muslim countries. However, although today most Muslims support a market-based approach to economic development, they disagree on the details of just how Muslims should engage Western forms of consumption and capitalism.

Adjusting to capitalism

THERE are several reasons for this ambivalence. First, the modern capitalism introduced into Muslim lands in the late 19th and early 20th century was not the felicitous product of free individuals shedding the shackles of feudal oppression; it was for the most part introduced into most Muslim lands by conquering Western colonialists. Worse yet, as far as many modern Muslims are concerned, those colonialists had a habit of reserving the commanding heights of the economy for fellow Europeans.

The second fact that has tainted Muslim perceptions of modern capitalism is that the capitalism that flooded into Muslim societies beginning in the 1970s was no longer the modestly dressed and appetite-denying enterprise of Max Weber's early 19th-century capitalism. The new variety was far less ascetic and far more self-indulging. From Levis and McDonald's to Madonna and Lady Gaga, this consumerist capitalism was thick with lifestyle entailments, many of which struck observant Muslims as ethically questionable if not outright un-Islamic.

There continue to be significant areas of tension between market-friendly Islam and Western capitalism, but some of these have resulted in bursts of creative cultural development. Consider how Muslims have adapted to Western-styles of banking.

One of the fastest-growing financial instruments in today's Middle East and Southeast Asia is Islamic banking. Islamic banking proscribes the use of interest, on the grounds (disputed by some Mus-

lim scholars) that the Qur'an forbids interest-bearing loans. Islamic banking also prohibits investment in enterprises deemed irreligious or immoral, including alcohol production and some forms of commercial and property speculation.

In spite of these points of tension with mainline capitalism, Islamic banking makes ready use of most of the instruments of conventional banking, including savings accounts and mortgages. To the surprise of some critics, Islamic banking has been proved to be an effective and profitable financial investment instrument. Many Western banks have enthusiastically developed their own *sharia*-compliant branches, and these have proved every bit as profitable as conventional banking.

These and other examples illustrate that, despite continuing disputes over some aspects of modern capitalism, a market-friendly economic ethic has now taken root in most of the Muslim world. The proponents of market Islam tend to be more interested in helping their Muslim fellows to develop market skills and a keen business sense than in making blanket condemnations of Western capitalism.

More intriguingly, some of the most celebrated proponents of market Islam borrow enthusiastically from the writings of American business management and self-help therapies. Although the proponents of market Islam will likely continue to oppose some of the more permissive aspects of Western consumerism, they are helping to make Muslim countries and businesses increasingly competitive players in the global marketplace.

Cultural diversity and the Muslim future

DURING the heyday of modernization theory in the 1950s, Western analysts had forecast that Muslim societies would inevitably experience the same processes of privatization and decline that, it was assumed (far too simplistically), religion in the modern West had undergone. Muslims might be latecomers to the secularization process, the argument went, but they too would succumb to the secularist juggernaut. By the time the Islamic revolution swept Iran in 1978–9, this forecast had begun to look premature. By the early 1990s, it seemed simply wrong. For many Muslims, being religious is very much compatible with being modern.

Whether in matters of culture, economics, or politics, this resurgence of interest in religiosity is neither unified in its expression nor, as the example of Islamic banking shows so well, hostile to Western society and culture. The range of political ideals voiced also varies enormously.

Some Muslims insist on the compatibility of Islam with pluralism and democracy. Indeed, surveys of public opinion around the world indicate that in most Muslim-majority societies, the majority of people subscribe to the idea that Islam is fully compatible with democracy.

However, other actors continue to call for a far-reaching transformation of the economy, society, and politics, insisting that these be modeled on the first generations of Muslim believers. The latter

view is, however, a minority one. Moreover it is a view that, notwithstanding the ardor of some of its proponents, is encountering greater difficulty in the face of the Muslim world's continuing educational, demographic, and social transformations.

Culture and society around the Muslim world are, if anything, becoming more and not less pluralistic. Notwithstanding the tumult seen in recent years in several Muslim societies, and contrary to the image conveyed in much media coverage, the combination of economic growth, educational advance, and new social media has fueled a remarkable social optimism and desire to be modern. These simple aspirations promise to be a force for continuing cultural change.

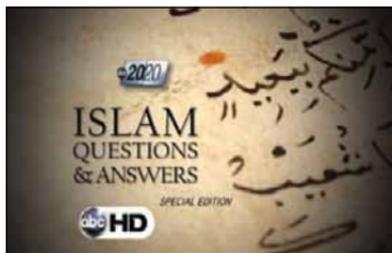


Ten Questions about Islamic Civilization

By Carl Ernst

In the name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful. Praise be to God, the Cherisher and Sustainer of the world; Most Gracious, Most Merciful; Master of the Day of Judgment. Thee do we worship, and Thine aid we seek. Show us the straight way, the way of those on whom Thou hast bestowed Thy Grace, those whose (portion) is not wrath, and who go not astray. — *Al-Fatiha*, Yusuf Ali translation

1. What do we mean by Islamic civilization?



THE concept of *civilization* was born in the 1700s and embraced only Western Europe. The notion was that, beyond Western Europe's borders, the rest of the globe writhed in barbarism and ignorance. The think-

ing was that these distant lands lacked complex social, cultural, and historic traditions.

And so, when the European colonial powers sought new lands,

one of their rationales was that they were bringing civilization where none existed. The French termed this effort their “civilizing mission.”

But today it is widely recognized that there has been an Islamic civilization for the last 14 centuries and it shares the same Greek and Hebrew roots as Western civilization.

In the wake of the 9/11 attacks in the U.S. and terror attacks by Muslim radicals across the globe, Islamic civilization came under a new and intense scrutiny.

Although Samuel Huntington argued in the 1990s that there is an inevitable “clash of civilizations,” most historians reject this argument as superficial and inaccurate. Muslim leaders have in fact advocated a “dialogue of civilizations,” and in 2005 the presidents of Spain and Turkey established the [Alliance of Civilizations](#) under UN sponsorship to promote intercultural dialogue and cooperation.

Islamic civilization eventually covered a huge territory, so that it consisted of many established cultures, and it included multiple religious groups alongside Muslims (Jews, Christians, and others) as well as different ethnic identities besides Arabs (Persians, Greeks, Turks, Indians, etc.). For that reason, some scholars prefer to call it “Islamicate” civilization, to indicate that there has been a larger cultural complex related to, but distinct from, Islamic religion, in which both Muslims and non-Muslims participated.

2. Was there such a thing as an Islamic empire? And how Islamic was it?

SINCE the time of the Prophet Muhammad (d. 632), there have been numerous political regimes led by Muslims. These range from the empire of the Abbasid Caliphate (founded in 749, and overthrown by the Mongols in 1258) to the various sultanates and later empires, such as the Safavids in Persia, the Mughals in India, and the Ottomans in Turkey. All of these empires were based on pre-Islamic political structures that were essentially monarchies (Persian kingship, the Roman Empire, the Mongol conquests). Their governmental apparatus and social institutions included considerable amounts of local custom and ancient ethical and philosophical traditions, so they differed from one place to another.

To varying degrees, these regimes employed Muslim scholars in bureaucratic capacities, and they applied Islamic law for their Muslim subjects, but they also issued purely administrative decrees based on royal authority. None of these societies has had a 100 percent Muslim population. In short, Islam was only one element in these societies. Accordingly, the idea of a “Muslim world” is misleading — as if there were a separate planet inhabited only by Muslims and detached from everyone else. Granted, it has become media shorthand for the broad swath of Muslim-majority countries, but it is important to realize that the fantasy of reviving an Islamic caliphate, proposed by a few fringe Muslim figures today and magnified by anti-Muslim propagandists, is about as realistic as the prospects of bringing back the Roman Empire.

3. *What is Islamic law, or sharia? What relevance does it have today?*

SHARIA historically was an evolving body of law and ethics generally based on four sources: the text of the Qur'an, the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, the consensus of Islamic legal scholars, and the use of analogy to deal with new subjects.

While *sharia* law was an important element in many pre-modern regimes, there has never been a society entirely governed by it; non-Muslim groups such as Christians and Jews were governed by their own legal codes for internal matters. *Sharia* has always existed alongside local custom and administrative rulings, which regularly overrule it. Legal scholars belonging to the principal schools of law (there are four Sunni schools of law and one main Shia school) typically defined *sharia* as the current scholarship in that particular school; Islamic law was essentially a form of case law with a high degree of independence for jurists, who were not bound by precedent. European colonial powers often retained Muslim personal law (marriage, divorce, inheritance) to avoid alienating subject populations, but colonial officials (and their successors in independent nation-states) transformed *sharia* case law into European-style legal codes with inflexible rulings. When contemporary nation-states claim to be based on Islamic law, this declaration ignores the fact that most of the modern state apparatus has little to do with Islam.

Accordingly, what may be called *sharia* today often bears

very little resemblance to the sophisticated schools of Islamic legal thought in pre-modern times, which evolved their teachings outside of political circles (thought often with the patronage of rulers). Political leaders with no training in Islamic law today claim to be applying *sharia* by enforcing a handful of harsh medieval punishments, such as stoning for adultery, but this is usually just a theatrical form of intimidation. For most Muslims, *sharia* functions as an ethical concept comparable to Roman Catholic canon law or Jewish *Halakha*, both of which are followed by the religiously observant alongside secular law.

As far as Muslims in America are concerned, *sharia* is no threat to American constitutional law. Islamic law calls upon Muslims to obey the laws of the countries where they live (which effectively rules out polygamy). The main application of *sharia* for observant Muslims will be in areas like marriage contracts, interest-free banking, funeral rites, and dietary restrictions (availability of halal foods, similar to Jewish Kosher food; pork is forbidden in both systems).

So-called “honor killings” have no basis in Islamic law, but are customary practices of patriarchal societies with a high sensitivity to shame. In effect, “honor killings” are much like the “unwritten law” that for years permitted Texas husbands to shoot adulterous wives and their lovers. Likewise, the practice of female genital mutilation (FMG) has little to do with Islamic law. It is widely practiced in many areas of Africa, especially in traditional “animist” religions, and in Egypt it is more common among Christians than among Muslims.

4. What was the role of non-Muslims in Islamic civilization?

CONTRARY to popular myth, the aim of the empire of the caliphate was not to spread Islam by the sword; it was really just another empire seeking wealth and, as Muslims paid less tax, converts to Islam meant lost tax revenue. It is also important to point out that non-Muslims had a legally protected status under Islamic law, safeguarding their life, property, and religion, though in a somewhat second-class status because of additional taxes. Existing religious groups (first Jews and Christians, and later Zoroastrians, Hindus, and others) were given the legitimate status of “people of the book.” This recognition stands in contrast to the lack of any legal protection for non-Christian minorities (in particular, Jews) in Europe before the French Revolution. It is also noteworthy that Jews, Christians, and Hindus could and did hold high office in Muslim-dominated regimes.

5. What is the relationship of the Prophet Muhammad and the Qur’an to Jewish and Christian traditions and communities?

THE Qur’an draws upon previous traditions of prophecy, including biblical as well as extra-biblical precedents. The Qur’an was aimed at an audience in seventh-century Arabia that was quite familiar with biblical and related texts, and it frequently refers to proph-

ets such as Abraham, Moses, Jesus, John the Baptist, and others. It presents an apocalyptic message that warns of divine punishment for those who disobey God's express command. The monotheistic message dominates in the Qur'an, and it rejects both pagan polytheism and the concept of the Trinity or divine incarnation as infringements on God's unity. The Qur'an indicates that Muhammad debated these issues intensively with Jews and Christians.

Recent research demonstrates, however, that alongside verses reflecting conflict with Arabian pagans, and debates with Christians and Jews, key passages occur in centrally placed locations that acknowledge religious pluralism as part of the divine plan. The criterion that the Qur'an applies is that those who accept the one God as Creator, and fear the last judgment, will be rewarded or punished according to their deeds rather than anything else.

Some Muslim scholars (and some anti-Islamic writers) argue that there are a few late verses in the Qur'an that command unrestricted warfare against non-Muslims, and that these verses abrogate or cancel out dozens of statements calling for mutual acceptance and tolerance. The context of those verses indicates, however, that they were directed against the polytheistic pagans of Mecca, and the history of the early spread of Islam demonstrates that monotheistic religious communities were recognized as legitimate in treaty agreements.

6. *What are the main religious divisions among Muslims?*

THE chief division is between Sunnis and Shia (Shiites), which originated in a debate over succession to the authority of the Prophet Muhammad. Those who supported the claims of Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law Ali (*shia* means “party” and Shi‘i means “partisan”) identified his descendants as the rightful *imams*, or religious leaders. But several of Muhammad's other disciples succeeded to the office of caliph before Ali, and after Ali's death by assassination in 661, the caliphate became a hereditary kingship. Ali's son Husayn led a revolt against the Umayyad caliph, but he and his followers were wiped out in a battle near Kerbala (in modern-day Iraq). Shia recognize him and his successors as martyrs who were persecuted by unjust tyrants. The largest group of Shia today is the Twelvers (so-called from their recognition of 12 imams after Muhammad), and they are the majority population in Iran, Iraq, and (probably) Lebanon, with significant minorities in South Asia and elsewhere; Shia probably make up about 15 percent of the world Muslim population today.

Sunnis are not so neatly defined, since by default they were those who accepted the status quo of the caliphate without wanting to challenge the established order. The name comes from the phrase “the people who follow the Prophet's example and the community,” and in practice Sunnis have the option of following any of four accepted Sunni legal schools (Maliki, Shafi‘i, Hanbali, or Hanafi).

There are minor differences between Sunnis and Shia in matters such as prayer ritual. So-called “fundamentalist” or reformist Muslim leaders in the 20th century, such as Syed Abul A’ala Maududi in India and Hasan al-Banna in Egypt, actually disregarded the authority of the Sunni legal schools and proclaimed their own interpretations of the Qur’an as authoritative, with no need for traditional authority.

There have been many other theological schools and divisions among Muslims over the centuries. Modern debates among Muslims are informed by a vocabulary and concepts that are familiar from European ideologies and schools of thought.

7. What are the contributions of Islamic civilization to science, medicine, and philosophy?

MUSLIM and non-Muslim scholars collaborated for centuries to make considerable advancements over the scientific and intellectual achievements of the Greeks and Persians. A massive translation movement, beginning around 800 in the Baghdad research institute called “the House of Wisdom,” brought the scientific and philosophical works of Aristotle, Plato, and Galen into Arabic — and this was a time when it would have been hard to put together a single bookshelf of such material in Western Europe. Hospitals and observatories were established to provide practical services and to advance medical and scientific research.

The great Persian physician and philosopher Ibn Sina (Avicenna,

d. 1030) wrote original interpretations of Aristotle's philosophy and a medical encyclopedia, *The Canon of Medicine*, that was still being used in Europe in the 17th century. It was in fact from Arabic that Aristotle was then translated into Latin in the 12th century, so that Christian thinkers such as Thomas Aquinas first learned Aristotelian philosophy from the Arabs.

Although it is often claimed that science and philosophy declined in Islamic civilization after the death of the Andalusian philosopher Ibn Rushd (Averroes, d. 1198), that statement largely ignores many later developments, particularly in Persia and India, that were unknown to Europe.

8. *What is the significance of art and literature in Islamic civilization?*

THERE are immense literatures of poetry and prose in Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and other languages, which are unfortunately not very well known because so few translations have been done; only a few isolated works like *The Thousand and One Nights* have been widely popularized in Europe and America. Major works of Islamic literature include the Persian poetry of Rumi (d. 1273), which has become very popular in America in recent years

In the same way, there are vast traditions in the visual arts, architecture, music, etc., in the Middle East, North Africa, South Asia, etc., where Muslims and non-Muslims engaged in cultural creativ-

ity. Some of the great monuments of Islamic architecture include the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem and the Taj Mahal in India; it is noteworthy that both these structures use Qur'anic inscriptions to convey religious messages, yet both were constructed by royal dynasties to make political statements. Although figural representation has been frowned upon in some Muslim circles, there is in fact a remarkably widespread tradition of painting among Muslims, illustrating both secular subjects and religious texts. A wide range of regional musical traditions have been cultivated in different Muslim societies, with characteristic instruments such as the Arabian *oud*, which gives its name to the European lute. Other distinctive musical cultures developed among the Persians, Turks, Indians, and others.

9. What kind of spirituality developed among Muslims as part of their faith?

FOR centuries, Muslims who sought a closer connection to God sought to deepen their faith through extra religious observances and meditations. Early practitioners of this kind of spirituality and ethics were known as Sufis, from the word (*suf*) meaning “wool,” the coarse garb of ascetics and prophets. For many, Sufi saints filled the role of spiritual intermediaries between God and humanity, and their tombs have become widely visited sites of holiness, from Morocco to China. Some of these regional Sufi shrines (such as Tuba in Senegal, and Ajmer in India) attract pilgrims in vast numbers that rival the

hajj pilgrimage to Mecca. In a similar fashion, Shia imams play a key role for their followers, who regard the pilgrimage to Ali's tomb in Najaf, or the shrine of Husayn in Kerbala, as an essential act of pious worship.

Sufism expanded in the form of various orders, based upon famous Sufi masters, whose teachings were transmitted both in complicated philosophical writings and in popular poetry. Rituals of musical performance are common in Sufi circles, ranging from the dance performance of the “whirling dervishes” in Turkey to the ecstatic singing of *qawwali* musicians in India and Pakistan.

While Sufis have received their share of criticism from modern reformists in many Muslim countries, as well as opposition from secular modernists, this tradition of spirituality continues to play a leading role for many Muslims today, particularly in rituals centered upon the veneration of the Prophet Muhammad.

10. What have we learned about Muslim societies' linkage and legacy?

WHILE it is convenient to use the phrase “Islamic civilization” to underscore the cultural and religious values that many Muslims share, it is important to recognize that there is no monolithic Islamic entity, nor indeed any single center of authority comparable to the Pope for Christianity. The pragmatic ethnic and political differences between dozens of Muslim majority countries, and the varying

situations of many Muslim minorities, make it impossible to imagine a unified Muslim response to global issues.

As in the past, there will be those groups that claim exclusive ownership of the true Islam, in the process rejecting any alternative voices, but the diverse history of Islamic civilization demonstrates a large capacity for accepting pluralism and multiple points of view.

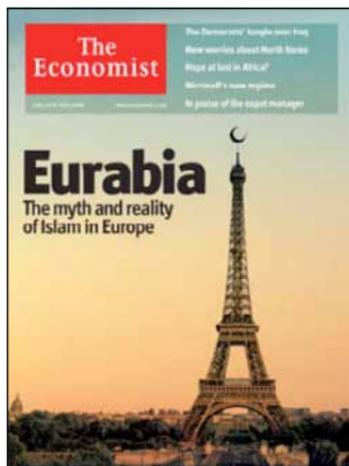
That legacy of tolerance remains available to Muslims (and non-Muslims) today.



Islam and Global Politics

What is “Political Islam”?

By Charles Kurzman



POLITICAL Islam is a set of political movements, founded in the 1920s, that seek to establish an Islamic state. Although they share a common discourse of Islamic piety and resentment of Western influence, movements associated with Political Islam vary in their goals, some democratic and some theocratic. In many Muslim societies, Political Islam forms the single largest political bloc. At its fringes, Political Islam has generated vio-

lent splinter groups, including terrorist organizations like al-Qaeda, the organization created by Osama Bin Laden.

The mainstream of Political Islam, however, is non-violent, pursuing power through evangelism, civic activism, and elections. Political Islam challenges Western-oriented political agendas in Muslim societies, but it rarely poses a security threat to the West.

If you decide to use the term “Political Islam,” be aware that few supporters of this movement call it by that name — the movement

considers itself simply the true expression of Islam. However, other related terms are also problematic:

Wahhabism. This term — a reference to Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, the founder of an Islamic movement in Arabia in the 18th century — is not widely used by “Wahhabis,” who are more likely to call themselves “Monotheists” (“*Muwahidun*” in Arabic).

Salafism. This term — a reference to the “*Salaf*,” an Arabic word for the revered companions of Muhammad, the prophet of Islam — is considered a positive identity by many Muslims, including many who do not support “Political Islam.”

Fundamentalism. This term comes from an analogy with Christian Fundamentalism, a theological movement that also became widespread in the 1920s. Christian Fundamentalism treats the religion’s holy book as literal revelation; by this criterion, almost all Muslims qualify as fundamentalists, not just supporters of “Political Islam.” In recent years, however, some supporters of “Political Islam” have adopted an Arabic translation of the term “fundamentalism,” *Usuliyya*, from the word “*usul*” (foundations or fundamentals).

Islamism. This term is somewhat broader than Political Islam, because it includes not just political movements but also non-political religious revivalist movements, such as

the Tablighi Jamaat in Pakistan. If you use the term “Islamists,” please be careful not to mistake it for “Islamists” (scholars who specialize in the study of Islam).

Given these complications, the term “Political Islam” may be the preferable term for this movement, so long as it is used carefully.

Is “Political Islam” the same thing as “radical Islam”?

NO. The bulk of Political Islam is not radical, revolutionary, terrorist, or violent. Radical Islamic groups are a small subset of Political Islam, and they are openly hostile toward non-radical supporters of Political Islam. In fact, radical Islamic groups have assassinated a number of prominent non-radical leaders in recent years. In 2009, for example, a large conference of religious scholars in Pakistan, most of them supporters of Political Islam, denounced extremists for killing civilians and for targeting religious scholars. Several weeks later, a suicide bomber killed Sarfraz Naeemi, one of the organizers of the conference.

Other leaders of Political Islam have continued to denounce violence, and continue to receive threats from radicals. Most famously, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, which abandoned revolutionary tactics in the 1970s, is the subject of frequent threats by al-Qaeda and other revolutionary organizations.

The non-revolutionary faction within Political Islam argues that an Islamic state cannot impose religious regulations on a population

that is not ready for them, citing the Quranic injunction that there is no compulsion in religion (2:256). They say that the people must be persuaded; first, through a hearts-and-minds campaign that Political Islam calls *dawa* (invitation), which is analogous to born-again evangelism in Christianity. The revolutionary faction argues that repressive government and Christian imperialists will block this peaceful approach, and that the government must be taken by force.

The outcome of this divide between radical and non-revolutionary factions of Political Islam is still up in the air. However, survey evidence suggests that the radicals' popularity drops when they attack their non-revolutionary rivals.

Aren't all Muslims supporters of "Political Islam," since there is no separation between church and state in Islam?

NO. Muslims have debated the relationship between religion and government since the first generations of Islam. The establishment of dynasties with little religious legitimacy, beginning with the Umayyads in the seventh century, led to a theological distinction between the state (*dawla*) and government law (*qanun*) and constitution (*dustur*), on one hand, and religious authorities (*ulama*) and religious law (*sharia*) on the other hand, although the two sets of institutions were often intertwined.

On a more abstract level, it is inaccurate to use the phrase "in Islam," just as it would be inaccurate to write "Islam says ..." — because Islam, like other major faith traditions, has no single definition or interpreta-

tion. Avoid these sorts of judgments, even if your sources use them. Replace them if necessary with phrases like: “Most Muslims believe that ...”

Since Mustafa Kemal Atatürk’s abolition of the Ottoman caliphate in 1924 with the birth of the Turkish Republic, only a few governments have tried to implement Islamic law. Most Muslims in the world live under secular authorities.

Even in places where aspects of Islamic law are in force, it is lay authorities such as kings, generals, or presidents, who legislate and enforce it. With the rise of government court systems worldwide over the 20th century, Islamic authorities now have very little judicial role outside of a handful of countries, such as Iran and Saudi Arabia.

Political Islam objects to this international trend toward secularized government. It emerged in the late 1920s and 1930s, in part as a response to the disappearance of the Ottoman Empire, as a symbol of Muslim unity, often in competition with traditional Islamic communal leaders.

The first mass organization to mobilize for an Islamic state, the Muslim Brotherhood (in Arabic: Jama’at al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin, or the Ikhwan for short), was founded in Egypt by Hasan al-Banna, a school-teacher. It was followed by the Jamaat-i-Islami (Urdu for the Islamic Society; Jamaat for short), which was formed in British India by Abul-Ala Maududi (also spelled Maudoodi or Mawdoodi), a journalist.

In subsequent decades, offshoots of the Muslim Brotherhood have spread throughout the Arab world, and descendants of the original Jamaat-i-Islami have multiplied across South Asia.

Both of these organizations engaged in militant rhetoric about

the need for a return to Islamic discipline and the bankruptcy of Western-style governments. The Muslim Brotherhood also organized paramilitary cadres in preparation for a possible putsch. After massive repression by secular military regimes, beginning in the early 1950s, both organizations gradually scaled back their militancy and recanted their revolutionary ambitions, embracing a culturally conservative vision of democracy instead. When elections have been held in Egypt, Pakistan, and other Muslim societies, the Muslim Brotherhood has frequently participated.

As a result of the “Arab Spring” uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, and elsewhere, Islamic parties and organizations that once were suppressed by their governments have come to the forefront. In Tunisia, the leading Islamic movement, promising moderation, emerged as the nation’s strongest political force. The Ikhwan and a smaller Salafi movement, likewise, dominated elections in Egypt.

Small breakaway groups have rejected this turn toward moderation since the 1960s, growing increasingly radical and violent. One breakaway faction assassinated Egyptian President Anwar Sadat in 1981, and the leader of another faction, Ayman al-Zawahiri, later fled Egypt and joined Osama Bin Laden to form al-Qaeda in Afghanistan.

Despite the disavowal of violence by the Muslim Brotherhood and other mainstream organizations of Political Islam, Egypt’s leaders from Gamal Abdel Nasser to Hosni Mubarak considered the movement to be a threat, as do authoritarian leaders in many other Muslim-majority countries.

While Political Islam now exists in every Muslim society, it remains subject to government suspicion, limitation, or outright repression almost everywhere. Even in Saudi Arabia, where the regime is so closely associated with Islam, Political Islam is considered a threat to the monarchy and is kept under careful surveillance.

How popular is “Political Islam” among Muslims?

IN some Muslim communities, Political Islam is quite popular; in others, much less so. In Egypt, one country where Political Islam is particularly popular, 80 percent of respondents to the World Values Survey agreed that “good government ... should implement only the laws of the *sharia*.” At the same time, 51 percent of Egyptian respondents agreed that “Religion is a matter of personal faith and should be kept separate from government policy,” according to the Pew Global Attitudes Project. To complicate matters further, a majority of respondents who support *sharia* and oppose keeping religion separate from government policy also support electoral democracy, according to these surveys. These inconsistent statistics remind us to be cautious in evaluating the popularity of Political Islam.

Take the example of the country with the most Muslims, Indonesia. According to a survey in 2002, 71 percent of Indonesians agree that the government should implement *sharia*, and 67 percent supported government by Islamic authorities. But in parliamentary elections in Indonesia, with high voter turn-out, Islamic parties won only one-third

or less of the ballots — most of them cast for a liberal Islamic group, the National Awakening Party, which opposes the imposition of *sharia*.

Political Islam has occasionally won elections. Some of the most famous of these are:

Egypt, 2011–2012, during the country’s first free parliamentary elections, when 65 percent of voters chose candidates associated with Political Islam, which fielded the most extensive campaign organizations in the new democracy. Months later, 42 percent of voters chose presidential candidates associated with Political Islam; in the runoff round, 52 percent chose the remaining candidate associated with Political Islam. However, the Brotherhood-led government was ousted by the military in 2013, sparking widespread unrest.

Tunisia, 2011, where the Renaissance (Nahda) party won 37 percent of votes in elections for the Constituent Assembly, in the wake of Tunisia’s pioneering “Arab Spring” uprising.

Algeria, 1991, where the Islamic Salvation Front (known by its French acronym, FIS, for Front Islamique du Salut) served as an umbrella organization for a variety of opposition forces, including many secular Algerians, who sought to end the one-party rule of the socialist regime. With the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe, the ruling party allowed free elections, and the FIS won 81 percent of

the first round of parliamentary voting. Then the military stepped in, canceled the election, and a civil war ensued.

Turkey, 1995, where the Welfare Party (Refah Partisi or RP in Turkish) won 29 percent of seats in parliament and the prime ministership, more than doubling its previous electoral performance. The military ousted the Welfare Party from power in 1997, but it was followed by two successor groups. One of these, the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, or AKP, sometimes abbreviated as the AK party), downplayed the Islamic rhetoric of the Welfare Party and won elections resoundingly in 2002, 2007, and 2011.

Palestine, 2006, where Hamas (the Arabic acronym for Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya, or Islamic Resistance Party) won 36 percent of the vote in its first parliamentary campaign. Because the ruling party, Fatah (the leading component of the Palestinian Liberation Organization), had split its support among competing candidates, Hamas won a majority of seats in parliament and assumed the prime ministership. The following year, disputes between the Fatah president and the Hamas prime minister led to a breakdown in Palestinian government, with Hamas taking control of the Gaza Strip and Fatah taking control of the West Bank.

Over the past generation, victories for parties linked to Political Islam have been few and far between. Far more commonly, Muslims declined to vote for Political Islam when given the opportunity. Islamic parties averaged less than 10 percent of seats when they ran for parliament, and the percentage was lower in free elections than in less-free elections. Political Islam did best in breakthrough elections, right after transitions from authoritarian to democratic systems, and less well as democratic procedures became more routine.

Surveys and election results do not always reflect individuals' private opinions, of course. But this sort of evidence is worth considering when making generalizations about the popularity of Political Islam. Do not assume that every Muslim man with a beard or every Muslim woman with a headscarf supports an unelected Islamic state.

Is “Political Islam” on the rise?

PROBABLY. In the 1960s and 1970s, Political Islam had been marginalized by secular movements such as nationalism and socialism, just as religious movements were marginalized in Christian and other faith traditions as well. Over the last generation, religion has made a comeback. Socialism, secular nationalism, and military juntas came to be seen as ineffective and overly dependent on outside powers.

However, we should not make too much of these local sources of Islamic revival, since Christian, Jewish, Hindu, and other societies have

also experienced religious revivals over the past generation. Much of the revival involves personal piety — praying more often, abiding by religious injunctions, and so on. However, political movements also gained momentum. One landmark event in this trend was the Iranian revolution of 1979, which installed an Islamic republic in place of a monarchy. In the 1980s, military governments adopted elements of *sharia* law in Pakistan and the Sudan. In the 1990s, the Taliban came to power in Afghanistan.

Today, many politicians in Muslim communities emphasize their piety to an extent that they did not a generation ago. Just as American politicians arrange photo opportunities at churches and discuss their personal faith in interviews, Muslim politicians often promise to promote the cause of Islam. Even unelected politicians such as military dictators engage in this sort of campaigning.

Much of this is just talk. However, lay governments are also increasingly adopting policies drawn from Political Islam, partly out of increased piety and partly as an attempt to forestall Islamic critics. For example, several governments have adopted aspects of traditional criminal law, such as amputation of hands as a punishment for theft. The “Arab Spring” has prompted a wave of activism associated with Political Islam.

The trend does not run only in one direction — there are also recent moves to remove traditional Islamic regulations. One effort, for example, was the family law reform enacted in Morocco in 2004. In addition, there are indications that some Muslims have been disillusioned by Political Islam, especially in regions where it has become

part of the political establishment. Reform movements in Iran, such as President Muhammad Khatami's Second of Khordad Coalition (1997–2005) and presidential candidate Mir-Hossein Musavi's Green Movement (2009–present) are a dramatic example.

How does “Political Islam” view Western journalists?

MOST supporters of Political Islam believe that Islam is under assault, both military and cultural, by the West. Western journalists are often viewed as a key component in this assault, and you are likely to experience some or all of the following criticisms from sources associated with Political Islam:

- Western journalists focus too much on Muslim violence, and not enough on other aspects of Muslim communities.
- Western journalists give too much attention and credence to the news agendas and public statements of government officials, both in Muslim societies and in the West.
- Western journalists work for corporate news organizations that support Western interests. Even if a journalist were to report and write a story undermining those interests, the news organization would kill or bury it.
- Western journalists need to embrace Islam in order to truly understand Muslim societies.

These objections can be overcome by building a relationship of trust, or by appealing to the public relations benefits of Western news outlets. Many leaders of Political Islam have become media savvy over the past generation, and will recognize these benefits more keenly than you do.

Political Islam is a major phenomenon in Muslim societies. However, it does not fit the stereotype of a vast, well-organized threat. It varies considerably from country to country, suffers from significant internal disputes, and is not uniformly popular with Muslims. Since Political Islam has been under government limitations in most Muslim societies for generations, it is difficult to know what direction the movement will take as political conditions change. Nevertheless, there is consistent evidence that Political Islam has a substantial constituency in many Muslim societies, and that it will play a role in any freely elected government in these countries.

These expectations have been borne out over the past two years, as the “Arab Spring” has opened political opportunities for parties of all stripes in Tunisia, Egypt, and, to a lesser extent, in Morocco and other countries. Many parties associated with Political Islam have engaged in the new democratic politics, and have fared well in elections. Fringe revolutionary movements like al-Qaeda continue to denounce the mainstream of Political Islam for participation in electoral politics, but the bulk of the Muslim population has sided with the moderate wing of Political Islam and rejected the revolutionaries.



Reporter's Notebook: Covering the Anti-Islam Movement

By Bob Smietana



MY introduction to the anti-Islam movement started with a three-word email from my boss in the fall of 2009.

“Got a minute?” she asked.

My boss had received a tip that morning that a local mega-church was showing a movie that labeled Muslims as Nazis. Check it out, my boss said, and see what you find.

For the next two years that’s what I did. I found that the movie — *The Forgotten People*, produced by a Nashville area nonprofit called Proclaiming Justice to the Nations — was part of a larger anti-Islam movement growing in Nashville and around the country. Its members believe that Islam is an evil religion rooted in hatred and nurtured by violence. American Muslims, they claim are part of conspiracy to destroy the American way of life.

In Nashville, that message is spread in meetings held in churches,

community centers, and homes and through books, movies, websites, and online social networks. The goal is to prohibit the free exercise of Islam in the United States by social, political and legal pressure — opposing mosque construction, opposing any religious accommodations — like time off for prayer and being excused from lunch during Ramadan — in schools, and passing legislation that paints Islam as incompatible with the American way of life.

As Brigitte Gabriel, the head of ACT! for America, a leading anti-Islam group put it: “They must be stopped.”

Like any reporter, I wanted to answer some basic questions about this movement — who, what, where, when, and why? But even those basics are hard to find in the anti-Islam movement, where members are often anonymous, some leaders use fake names, and meetings are frequently off-limits to the press. Gabriel, for example, is really Hanan Kahwagi Tudor, a Lebanese Christian immigrant who used to work for Pat Robertson’s Christian Broadcasting Network.

Reporting on this movement meant a fundamental change in my approach. I’ve been covering religion since 1999 when I got my first job as a journalist. Most religious reporting is about ideas and institutions, about beliefs and spiritual practices. Most of it involves visits to houses of worship, conversations with believers and clergy, and reading sacred texts and the work of scholars.

That kind of reporting has helped when covering Muslims themselves — such as a long feature on an embattled mosque in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, or a story on how mosques in the U.S. are becoming

more congregational in approach, and building complexes with classrooms and gyms and multipurpose spaces, inspired by Protestant mega-churches.

But reporting on the anti-Islam movement meant becoming an investigative journalist. That began by first asking, “Who runs this movement?” and “What are their real names?” Finding Tudor’s name, for example, meant first pulling ACT! for America’s tax returns. Her real name wasn’t in there but there were clues, such as her husband’s name. I combed through property records and business records — the Tudors owned a video production company — until I found her real name. Then *The Tennessean* used that name in our stories despite the objections of ACT! for America (see [“Anti-Muslim crusaders make millions spreading fear”](#)).

Another breakthrough came from heeding that old adage, “follow the money.” Anytime I heard about another group involved in the anti-Islam movement — ACT! for America, the American Congress for Truth, the Center for Security Policy, the Society of Americans for National Existence or SANE, the Investigative Project on Terrorism Foundation — I pulled their tax returns and checked the backgrounds of their leaders.

In many cases, running an anti-Islam group was a lucrative business. Most leaders earned six-figure salaries, and their nonprofits took in millions of dollars in donations. The other key to reporting on the anti-Islam movement was showing up everywhere. Any time I heard about a rally or church gathering or meeting in a politician’s

garage, I showed up. Often people were unhappy that I was there — and I got threatened once — but I kept showing up until someone would talk to me.

Lastly, my editors were not satisfied with simple answers. They wanted to know what makes this anti-Islam movement tick. The simple answer would have been to use the label “Islamophobia.” But the real answer is more complicated. It turned out that a mix of factors — the economic downturn, a rapid rise in immigration, fear among evangelical Christians that they are losing home field advantage in America, the rise of Christian Zionism, concerns over homegrown terrorism, and the maturation of the Muslim community in Tennessee, so that Muslims were beginning take a more active role in local politics and culture — had created fertile ground for the ant-Islam movement.

It’s a story that won’t go away anytime soon. Until it does, I’ll keep following my boss’s orders — following the money, asking people what their real names are, and showing up even when I am not wanted.



Islam's Hard Edge

Fundamentalism and Jihad

By Charles Kurzman



WHAT is *Jihad*? *Jihad* is Arabic for “struggle,” including both armed struggle and non-violent struggles such as an individual’s effort to be a better person. This struggle is imbued with religious virtue, as described in the Qur’an: “And struggle for God, as struggle is His due” (22:78). For Muslims, *jihad* has a positive connotation. It is used only to describe Islamic struggles that one sympathizes with, whether these are armed

struggles or struggles against poverty and disease.

For decades, Islamic revolutionaries have used the term “*jihad*” to describe their battles against governments in Muslim societies and Western supporters of these governments. It is inaccurate to use the term simply as a synonym for violence, since that is only one of its meanings. However, this has become common usage in English-language news reports, along with the related terms “*jihadis*” and “*mujahideen*” (participants in armed *jihad*).

Jihad, in this sense of religious violence, has become one of the most important public issues of the early 21st century. The attacks of September 11, 2001, which were conducted in the name of *jihad*, sensitized Americans and the world to the dangers of Islamic revolutionaries. To date, however, *jihad* has been limited in its scope.

Aside from small, albeit dangerous, cadres of international terrorists, the banner of *jihad* has failed to mobilize Muslims outside of a few territories, primarily Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, and Palestine — and it faces significant opposition from most Muslims in these areas as well.

The leaders of *jihad* welcome sensationalist news coverage, which leverages the impact of their actions for national and international audiences. As a journalist, your challenge is to report on violent incidents and plots responsibly, without exaggerating the scope of the threat and contributing to the feelings of terror that terrorists seek to instill in your audience.

Is jihad a religious requirement for Muslims?

ALMOST all Muslims consider armed struggle in defense of Islam to be a religious requirement, just as most Christians believe in the doctrine of “just war.” Muslim leaders have long labeled their armed conflicts “*jihad*,” even against Muslim opponents. As in Christianity, Islamic scholars disagree about when armed struggle is justified, who should carry it out, and what methods of combat are permissible.

The most famous of these debates in recent times occurred just after September 11, 2001. In a *fatwa* (religious judgment) three days afterward, the heads of 46 Islamic movements around the world rejected the terrorist attacks as un-Islamic and not an appropriate instance of *jihad*:

The undersigned, leaders of Islamic movements, are horrified by the events of Tuesday 11 September 2001 in the United States which resulted in massive killing, destruction and attack on innocent lives. We express our deepest sympathies and sorrow. We condemn, in the strongest terms, the incidents, which are against all human and Islamic norms. This is grounded in the Noble Laws of Islam, which forbid all forms of attacks on innocents. God Almighty says in the Holy Quran: “No bearer of burdens can bear the burden of another” (*Surah al-Isra* 17:15).

Al-Qaeda responded with a statement calling this ruling apostasy. According to al-Qaeda, terrorist attacks are justified because Islam is being crushed by the West’s military presence, its support for regimes like the Saudi monarchy, which al-Qaeda considers un-Islamic, and its cultural influence in Muslim communities. “The only way to liberation from this humiliation is the sword, which is the only language the enemy understands that will deter it.” Al-Qaeda and other militants often cite the “Verse of the Sword” (9:5) and similar passages from the Qur’an in support of their position:

When the sacred months are over, slay the idolaters wherever you find them. Arrest them, besiege them, and lie in ambush everywhere for them. If they repent and take to prayer and render the alms levy, allow them to go their way. God is forgiving and merciful.

In reporting on these debates — as in reporting on all religious matters — do not claim or imply that one side is more authentic than another. To do so would be akin to serving as an arbiter of Islamic jurisprudence.

When did jihad morph into terrorism?

IN the middle of the 20th century, Islamic movements began to call for armed revolutions to overthrow postcolonial regimes that they considered overly secular. Among the most influential of these revolutionaries was Sayyid Qutb, an Egyptian intellectual who was executed in 1966 for advocating the overthrow of the government.

Qutb argued that armed revolt, which he equated with *jihad*, was necessary to defend Islam against the policies of government officials in Egypt and other Muslim societies, who he felt did not deserve to be called Muslim. Qutb's old organization, the Muslim Brotherhood (al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun), renounced his revolutionary vision, but his writings gained a following with a younger generation of militants.

At that time, Islamic revolutionaries did not engage in terrorist attacks on civilians. That was a technique used primarily by leftist and nationalist movements. In the Middle East, the Palestinian Liberation

Organization, an overtly secular organization, led the way. Islamic revolutionaries began to imitate their secular rivals in the late 1970s and early 1980s, adopting tactics such as kidnapping and car bombs alongside other revolutionary actions like assassination.

At the same time, some Islamic revolutionaries turned from local targets to global ones. The Soviet occupation of Afghanistan provided a training ground for new techniques of violence. Heavily funded by the U.S., groups of *mujahideen* waged war against the Soviets. They had come mostly from the Arab world, Afghanistan and South Asia. This was the ideological and military training ground for Osama Bin Laden, who aligned himself with the fighters based in Pakistan. U.S. officials later conceded that they were not aware of the extremism of some of the groups fighting against the Soviet and sought to curb their support too late in the effort.

But more significant was the sense of a global mission beyond the national borders that Islamic revolutionaries had previously worked within. This global vision survived past the withdrawal of Soviet troops, forming the founding ideology of al-Qaeda and its associated movements. Instead of Soviet targets, al-Qaeda now aimed at the United States as the chief threat to Islam. Al-Qaeda's most famous statement, issued in 1998, made no distinction between military and civilian targets: "The ruling to kill the Americans and their allies — civilians and military — is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it." The attacks of September 11, 2001, grew out of this strategy.

How popular is jihad among Muslims?

MANY Muslims share al-Qaeda's concern about American global military influence. According to surveys by the Pew Global Attitudes Project and other pollsters, as many as two-thirds of Muslims consider the U.S. to be the greatest threat to their country's national security. In Pakistan, for example, more than twice as many respondents named the United States as a greater threat to their personal safety than al-Qaeda and the Taliban, who have been bombing politicians, religious leaders, and ordinary citizens around the country for several years.

However, this sympathy for the anti-American aspects of al-Qaeda's platform has not translated into support for al-Qaeda itself. Large majorities oppose these groups. Gallup polls in a number of Muslim-majority countries in late 2001 and early 2002 found that only one in seven respondents believed the attacks of 9/11 were justifiable. Within this one-in-seven, most followed movies, television series, and game shows; they were more likely than other respondents to read art books and novels and to favor "living in harmony with those who do not share your values." These are not al-Qaeda characteristics.

As al-Qaeda and associated groups have turned back toward local targets in the years since 9/11, their support has dwindled further, according to international surveys. In Jordan, for example, suicide bombers attacked a wedding reception in November 2005, killing more than

50 people. Support for al-Qaeda dropped by two-thirds. In Morocco, sympathy for Bin Laden fell by half after the Casablanca bombings of May 2003. In Pakistan, where attacks increased 10-fold between 2005 and 2008, opposition to violence against civilians more than doubled.

Among American Muslims, a survey by the Pew Research Center in 2011 found that 70 percent of Muslims in the U.S. held a very unfavorable view of al-Qaeda, up from 58 percent in 2007.

How coordinated is global jihad?

REVOLUTIONARY *jihad* has two major branches. One is global in scope, represented most famously by al-Qaeda. This branch seeks to mobilize Muslims all over the world, and its goal is a transnational Islamic state based in Arabia. The other is local in scope, aiming to establish revolutionary regimes in particular territories. The most famous of these movements are the Taliban in Afghanistan and Hamas (the Arabic acronym for Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya, or Islamic Resistance Movement) in Palestine. These two branches have maneuvered around each other uneasily for the past generation, with occasional coordination and occasional rivalry.

The closest coordination occurred in the 1980s, when Arab revolutionaries joined Afghan militias in the fight against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. This coordination continued into the 1990s, when Osama Bin Laden and other Arab revolutionaries established paramilitary bases under the protection of the Taliban.

This alliance frayed with Bin Laden's pursuit of a global revolutionary agenda. At one point Mullah Muhammad Omar, the leader of the Taliban, forbade Bin Laden to give interviews to international journalists, out of concern that the Taliban had enough foreign-relations problems without Bin Laden's provocations.

Nonetheless, Mullah Omar was unwilling to shut down Bin Laden's camps or expel him from the country, even after the events of 9/11 made it clear that Bin Laden had provoked an invasion of Afghanistan.

Since 9/11, the Afghan Taliban and al-Qaeda have coordinated sporadically. Some Taliban commanders have adopted al-Qaeda tactics such as suicide bombing and have arranged for al-Qaeda training with explosives. However, al-Qaeda's closest local allies are a new group, the Pakistani Taliban (Tehrik-i Taliban Pakistan, or Taliban Movement of Pakistan), which aims to overthrow the government of Pakistan.

This group is responsible for much of the recent terrorist violence in Pakistan, including the assassination of prime ministerial candidate Benazir Bhutto in 2007, and it offers much more open support to al-Qaeda's global agenda than Mullah Omar and the Afghan Taliban have.

Other local *jihad* organizations have also affiliated themselves with al-Qaeda: Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi's Group of Oneness and Jihad (Jama'at al-Tawhid w'al-Jihad, now called al-Qaeda in Iraq); the Salafist Group for Call and Combat in Algeria (now al-Qaeda in the

Maghreb, or AQIM — *Maghreb* refers to the western portion of North Africa); al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (originally in Saudi Arabia, now based in Yemen); Jemaah Islamiyah in Southeast Asia; and al-Shabaab (the Youth) in Somalia. The extent of coordination between these affiliates and the central organization of al-Qaeda is unclear, but is likely quite limited.

The largest and most powerful territorial *jihad* organizations, however, are hostile to al-Qaeda: Hamas in Palestine and Hezbollah (Party of God) in Lebanon. Hamas has been opposed to global *jihad* since before al-Qaeda was founded in the 1990s. It seeks to establish an Islamic state in Palestine and views other territorial aspirations as distractions from that goal. Hamas's leaders and al-Qaeda's leaders have traded barbed insults for years, and Hamas's rule in Gaza has been challenged over the past several years by small revolutionary cadres that claim solidarity with al-Qaeda. Hezbollah, for its part, is a Shia organization; al-Qaeda and almost all Sunni *jihad* groups consider Shia to be false Muslims (though this has not prevented occasional collaboration with Shia militants).

Al-Qaeda faces severe logistical pressures and difficulties in attracting sufficient recruits to replace the cadres who are captured or killed, or who retire. As a result, it is no longer training several thousand militants at a time, as it did under the Taliban. Instead, it now trains dozens at a time, and focuses much of its energy on “virtual” *jihad* via the Internet.

Although it is unable to maintain a stable Internet presence due

to intergovernmental security cooperation, al-Qaeda issues frequent pronouncements, PDF magazines, and videos through anonymous file-sharing sites and online bulletin boards. Even before the assassination of Osama Bin Laden in Abbottabad, Pakistan, in 2011, militancy among revolutionary *jihad* groups had begun to shift away from the central organization and toward regional offshoots and small numbers of do-it-yourself individuals, some of whom took inspiration, strategic advice, and practical training tips from al-Qaeda and its largest associate groups.

This pattern of decentralization is particularly visible in the Sahel region of West Africa, which has developed since 2011 into a site of particularly violent revolutionary *jihad*. Some of the most active revolutionary *jihad* movements in the world operate in this region, including Boko Haram, which has terrorized northern Nigeria with bombings and armed raids on churches, newspapers, government offices, and other sites; and two groups that have taken over northern and eastern Mali, Ansar Dine (Supporters of the Faith) and the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (sometimes known by its French acronym, MUJAO). These violent organizations express solidarity with al-Qaeda and use some of its tactics, but have so far remained autonomous. Their agendas are primarily local, although they have apparently cooperated with AQIM, an al-Qaeda affiliate, which is now operating openly in Gao, in eastern Mali.

How big is the death toll from jihad?

OVER the past 40 years, *jihad* organizations have killed perhaps 165,000 individuals, including 10,000 during the *mujahideen* campaign against the Soviets in Afghanistan; approximately 100,000 during civil conflict in Iraq and approximately 55,000 victims of Islamist terrorism outside of Iraq.

Within the United States, the death toll from *jihad* is dominated by the approximately 3,000 people killed on September 11, 2001. From September 12, 2001, until the end of 2012, there were 209 Muslims, who had lived in the U.S. for at least one year, and who had been convicted, faced ongoing criminal cases or were allegedly involved in acts of terror but died before they could be brought to trial. Their actions resulted in approximately 33 fatalities. A handful of these were illegally in the U.S.

It is useful to put this terrible toll in context with other sources of violence. In the United States, the FBI reports that more than 14,000 people are murdered each year. All around the world, more than half a million people are murdered annually, according to the World Health Organization. At their peak, *jihad* organizations have accounted for less than 2 percent of this toll — in most years, they account for well under 1 percent. (Another half a million die each year from nutritional deficiencies, more than 800,000 from malaria, and 2 million from HIV/AIDS.) *Jihad* is not a leading cause of death in the world, even in the three countries that account for the bulk of the casualties: Afghanistan, Iraq, and Pakistan.

Of the hundreds of murders that occur each day, journalists are far more likely to report on *jihad*-related incidents than other violence. As a result, news consumers have developed a skewed impression of the prevalence of *jihad* relative to other forms of conflict. Journalists are just doing their job in reporting on this important global story. However, in doing so, they amplify fears of *jihad*, just as the *jihad* organizations intend.

There's no denying that violent *jihad*-related movements exist. The challenge for journalists is unraveling their roots and reporting their context, including the vocal opposition to terrorism within Muslim communities.



Reporter's Notebook:
**Covering the American
Mosque Story**

By Jason Samuels



SHORTLY after I joined CNN in 2010, I was given a rather broad assignment. I was tasked with developing and producing a documentary about Muslims in America. There are an estimated 6–7 million Muslims living in America. My job was to find one story that would illuminate the experience of living as a Muslim in post-9/11 America.

When I began my assignment, the so-called “Ground Zero mosque” debate was raging. The cable news networks, including CNN, were covering the protests and heated rhetoric non-stop. Usually my instinct as a journalism is to ignore the pack mentality. When a crowd of journalists is chasing one story, better stories are often left undisturbed — waiting to be unearthed.

After a good deal of research I stumbled onto something. I read an article in a Tennessee newspaper describing a community in Mid-

dle Tennessee rallying against the building of a local mosque. While most of America was focused on the controversy unfolding in lower Manhattan, few Americans were paying attention to what was taking place, hundreds of miles away in Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

The story was rather compelling. A small community of Muslims in town had outgrown their current mosque. During some prayer services at the mosque, worshippers had to literally pray on the street. The congregation had raised money, purchased a large plot of land and had announced plans to build a bigger mosque. Community opposition followed. There were loud protest marches and heated city council meetings. Residents argued that the new mosque would increase the threat of *sharia* law, and negatively impact water quality and traffic safety.

As a journalist I was instantly drawn the story, and I immediately set out to contact the leader of the Muslim community in Murfreesboro — the imam. When I reached the imam on the phone, I told him I wanted to meet with him to discuss the possibility of a documentary focusing on community divide over the mosque plans. The imam was very pleasant, but informed me that wouldn't be possible. He explained that he and members of his congregation had been “tricked” by news media before, letting cameras into the mosque only to be painted in a negative and false light. I offered a simple request. I asked if we could at least meet in person to discuss. I would fly from New York to meet with him. No cameras. I insisted. The imam agreed to meet for lunch at Olive Garden in Murfreesboro Tennessee.

I was honest with the imam. I told him I knew very little about Islam, but, given the rising level of questions and anxiety many Americans had about Islam, I felt the story of what was happening in Murfreesboro was important, perhaps more important in fact than what was taking place in lower Manhattan. As we talked, he asked me questions about myself, my religious beliefs. In turn I asked him questions I had about Islam. It was my job to establish a foundation of trust and mutual respect that any journalist should strive to build with any potential subjects. With regards to the documentary, I told the imam I couldn't promise he would like it, but that he would respect it. At the end of the meal he said he would think about my proposal.

A few days later the imam called to tell me that he would agree to let CNN cameras and me into the mosque to interview him and members of his congregation. In the days, weeks and months that followed I spent many hours “embedded” in the mosque and Muslim community in Murfreesboro.

Most days I observed. I asked questions. I listened. I learned. The first day I walked in the mosque, a congregant stopped me and pointed at my shoes. Shoes are not allowed inside the mosque. I apologized and made sure it didn't happen again.

I think it's important for journalists to understand the communities they are covering. Yet I'm uncomfortable offering any specific set of tips for journalists covering the Muslim community.

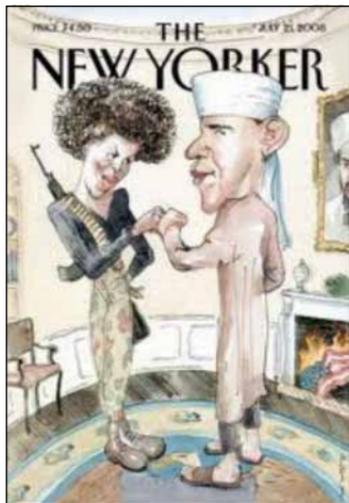
Indeed, as a working journalist, I think there should be one set of guidelines for journalists covering any community. Treat your subjects

with respect. Listen more. Talk less. Be humble. Be open about what you don't know. Share a bit of yourself and your personal story. Be empathetic; yet report without fear or favor. Maintain professional distance. Value your subject's time and make sure they understand your process and their role. Don't make any promises you can't keep. Regardless of the individual or community you are covering — credibility is earned.



Islam in America

By Karam Dana and Stephen Franklin



THESE have been memorable times for American Muslims; times of success and sorrow, assimilation and rejection. Their numbers have grown. Their voices have become louder. Their schools and institutions have proliferated. Muslims today call home places across the U.S. where there were few if any of their co-religionists before.

But as American Muslims have become more visible in U.S. society some Americans have questioned Islam and the loyalty of Muslims and turned against their old and new neighbors. This has frustrated many Muslims, hurt by the finger-pointing and distrust.

The story of Islam in America is a situation in flux. A largely young population, the American Muslim community will grow as families expand. So too, immigration from the Muslim world will continue to increase, driven by family linkages as well global political and economic realities.

How will American Muslims claim their place in society? Will the wounds of foreign-born terrorism and the stain of stereotypes and prejudice linger?

The assignment for journalists is to understand the community, its history and changes.

This is also an American immigrant story, like any other. Nearly two-thirds of Muslims in the U.S. were born overseas, according to a 2011 study by the Pew Research Center.

Who are America's Muslims?

AS members of a religion that transcends color, race, national origin, and language, it's nearly impossible to offer a single portrait of Muslims around the world. This is true for American-born Muslims and immigrants, who come from the 49 Muslim-majority countries as well as the many others with major Muslim communities.

To be sure, religion binds Muslims and this is increasingly the case for Muslims in America. But Muslims from Nigeria and Pakistan, from Malaysia and France would readily agree that there are major differences between them, not least culture.

[A 2011 survey of mosques](#) by leading Muslim organizations and religious scholars showed that South Asians make up the largest number of people who attend U.S. mosques. This confirms other studies that indicate South Asians (Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis and Afghans) account for the greatest number of Muslims in the U.S.

The study of mosque participants produced these results:

South Asians	Arabs	African-Americans	Other
33%	27%	24%	16%

The same study showed a decline in the number of African-American Muslims in the decade 2000 to 2010 and pointed out that this mirrors a similar decline in the number of mosques where African-Americans are the majority. In past years, African-Americans made up the largest Muslim community. The survey indicates that the shift reflects new waves of immigration, particularly among Iranians, West Africans, Somalis and Bosnians.

The diversity of the Muslim population is indicated in the study's finding that only 3 percent of the mosques in the nation serve one ethnic group.

Number of Muslims in the U.S.

PINNING down the exact number of Muslims in America is difficult. That is because surveys often exclude those who live in hard-to-reach places. We also know that converts to Islam sometimes do not show up in surveys.

We can't count on the U.S. Census to tell us the exact number of Muslims in the United States because it does not ask questions related to one's religious identity.

As a result, we must rely on polling and estimates. The estimates vary from 3 million to 9 million Muslims living in the U.S. Still, we may be able to draw conclusions about the approximate number of Muslims, and possibly geographic distribution around the U.S., from these estimates.

For example, the 2012 Mosque Study found that about 2.6 million persons took part in the Eid prayer, considered one of the most holy prayers for Muslims, in 2011. Based on that number, the study suggested that there are as many as 7 million Muslims in the U.S.

That study also underlined the remarkable expansion in mosques in the U.S. Between 2000 and 2011, the number of mosques jumped from 1,209 to 2,106, a 74 percent increase. The newness of this growth is reflected in the fact that three-quarters of all mosques in the U.S. have been established since 1980.

The 2011 [Portrait of American Muslims](#) published by the Pew Center on Religion and Public Life predicted that the number of Muslims in the U.S. would go from 2.6 million to 6.2 million by 2030, mostly because of immigration and higher than average fertility rates.

By 2030, the Muslim population in the U.S. is expected to match that of Jews and Episcopalians, according to the same study. So, too, by 2030 the U.S. is expected to have more Muslims than any European country except France and Russia. The organization's survey also produced these insights:

Children under age 15 make up a relatively small portion of the U.S. Muslim population today. Only 13.1 percent of Muslims are in

the 0–14 age group. This reflects the fact that a large proportion of Muslims in the U.S. are newer immigrants who arrived as adults. But by 2030, many of these immigrants are expected to have started families. If current trends continue, the numbers of U.S. Muslims under age 15 will more than triple, from fewer than 500,000 in 2010 to 1.8 million in 2030. The number of Muslim children aged 0–4 living in the U.S. is expected to increase from fewer than 200,000 in 2010 to more than 650,000 in 2030.

The top countries of origin for Muslim immigrants to the U.S. in 2009 were Pakistan and Bangladesh. They are expected to remain the top countries of origin for Muslim immigrants to the U.S. in 2030.

As is the case for most immigrants, there are also more Muslim men than women, a reverse of the situation for the rest of the U.S., according to the Pew survey.

Muslims in the U.S. are overwhelmingly members of the Sunni community, an estimated 80 percent, which matches the global ratio. The remainder belong to various Muslim communities, among them Shiites from the Arab world, South Asia and Africa; Isma'ilis from South Asia and smaller groups such as Alawis from Syria and Lebanon. Sufi and Salafi movements exist here as well (see Glossary for definitions).

Muslims are middle class and mainstream

THE Pew organization similarly found relatively few differences between Muslim Americans and the general public in terms of

education and income in its 2011 survey. About one out of four American Muslims has a college degree, a figure about the same for the adult U.S. population as a whole. So, too, the earning potential of Muslims tracks that of most Americans. But there's a difference, the Pew survey noted. The middle class is slightly smaller among Muslims, and there's a higher percentage of Muslims than the general population who earn less than \$30,000 per year.

Another study that looked at Muslims in the United States is the [Muslim American Public Opinion Survey \(MAPOS\)](#), which reported that more than two-thirds of Muslims in the United States believe that their financial situation is at least fairly secure. This is relatively higher than other minority groups in the U.S.

According to the MAPOS data, 61 percent of Muslim Americans have at least a college degree, a percentage that is relatively high compared to other immigrant groups. More than half of Muslims surveyed in MAPOS owned their own homes (54 percent). Among those surveyed, 82 percent were American citizens, and other surveys have reflected this figure.

Politically, most American Muslims are liberal when asked about the role and size of the government. But they are social conservatives, and would like to see government protect public morality, the survey showed.

Comparing American Muslims to Christians in terms of their religious practices, the survey found that Muslims tend to believe slightly more that religion is “very important in their lives.” About 70 percent fell

into this category. But nearly the same proportion (40 percent) of Muslims as Christians say they are likely to attend religious services weekly.

Describing the main points of the survey, [Andrew Kohut](#), head of the Pew Center said:

This is a group that is living as most Americans are — we find Muslim Americans to be highly assimilated. Most report that the largest proportion of their friends is non-Muslim. On balance they believe Muslims who come to the United States should try to assimilate and adopt American customs rather than trying to remain distinct, or they feel they should do a little bit of both. Most do not see a conflict between being a devout Muslim and living in a modern society. So another one of the major findings is this is an assimilated group or a group that at least aspires to assimilation.

The 2009 Gallup [Muslim and American Public Opinion Survey](#) produced similarly significant details about Muslims in America. It found that:

- Muslim Americans are the most racially diverse religious group in the U.S.
- Eight out of ten Muslim Americans said religion plays an important role in their lives, a percentage exceeded only by Mormons.
- Compared to Muslims in other Western societies and most Muslim-majority countries, Muslims in the U.S. generally feel more satisfied with their lives.

- While Muslim Americans are more religious than most others, religion plays a smaller role in their lives than for those who live in predominantly Muslim countries.
- American Muslim women are at least as likely as Muslim men to hold a college or postgraduate degree.
- Muslim American women are roughly equal to Muslim men in frequent mosque attendance, in sharp contrast to women in many majority Muslim countries who are generally less likely than men to report attending a religious service in the last week.
- After Jewish Americans, Muslim Americans are the most educated religious community studied. But Muslim women, unlike Jewish women, are statistically as likely as their male counterparts to say they have a college degree or higher education.

With the Muslim community's rapid growth have also come shortcomings and problems, according to the 2012 report on the nation's mosques. It found that women are "still largely marginalized in mosques" and the mosques have not answered the call to make themselves "women friendly."

The vast majority of full-time imams are immigrants who have been trained outside the U.S. In contrast, the report said that American mosques "need Imams who are trained in Islam, but who are also trained in the functions of an Imam in the American setting."

Underfunding is a serious problem. Only 44 percent of imams in the nation's mosques are full-time and paid, as compared to 71 percent in other faiths. And half of all mosques have no paid staff, said the report, which warned that mosques cannot continue to grow if they primarily rely on volunteer staff. The solution, according to the report, is the professionalization of the clergy.

Early Muslim arrivals in America

ISLAM has existed in America since the early days of the colonies. Some evidence suggests that Christopher Columbus was able to make his famous voyage to the U.S. with the help of Muslim navigators. It has been suggested that Muslims had actually arrived in the Americas before Columbus.

Various founding fathers were very familiar with Islam and some had a copy of the Qur'an. Thomas Jefferson's copy of the Qur'an was used in 2008 to swear U.S. Rep. Keith Ellison to Congress. The copy was produced in London in 1764.

A large number of the slaves brought from Africa, especially West Africa, were Muslim. In most cases these slaves lost their links to their religion. But some managed to keep their ties to their religion in plantations of the coasts of the Carolinas and Georgia.

And as black Americans searched to find a place for themselves in this country, Islam became one of the answers.

During the early 20th century, there was some increase in black

people turning to Islam, but real change did not take place until the second half of the 20th century.

One of the first communities was the Moorish Science Temple of America (MST) (1913), which claimed both an American and a Moroccan heritage. It is estimated that thousands of black people were associated with this community, which had as one hallmark a principle of community self-help.

The MST developed one of the first American Muslim newsletters and a series of products ranging from remedies for various illnesses to products for personal hygiene. Members also affixed their surnames with, or changed them to El or Bey, signifying a link to the Muslim world. These distinctive names remain a part of the surname family in the general African-American community into the 21st century.

Associates and members of the MST have been most active not only in their own rituals and activities but also those of other communities — Sunni Muslims and the Nation of Islam (NOI). Some even hold dual memberships, seeking a place of African-American comfort and a place to learn Islam. The MST additionally introduced to the general community the fez — a Moroccan hat that had previously been only worn by members of the black Masonic lodges.

Today Moorish Science Temples exist in Prince George, Virginia; Bonner Springs, Kansas; Chicago, Illinois; St. Louis, Missouri; Cleveland, Ohio; Newark, New Jersey; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Charlotte, North Carolina; Pontiac, Michigan; Toledo, Ohio; Brooklyn, New York; and Detroit, Michigan.

Also emerging early in the 20th century were African-American Sunni communities such as the Ahmadiyyah movement in America, the Islamic Brotherhood, the Addeynu Allahe Universal Arabic Association, the Fahamme Temple of Islam and Culture, and the First Mosque of Pittsburgh.

The Ahmadiyyah community came to the United States from India and brought Islam in the mouths of missionaries whose aim was primarily to engage white Americans. It was black Americans, however, who answered their call. The Ahmadiyyah movement follows the teachings of a 19th-century South Asian religious reformer and promotes the peaceful propagation of a variant of Islam. But its followers have suffered discrimination in parts of the Muslim world because of their beliefs.

The Ahmadiyyah movement published the first Qur'ans translated into English in large quantities, enabling members in all of the communities to own one.

Claiming Islam as their religion and worldview, and learning from a variety of sources, members of these Ahmadiyyah communities developed autonomous communities also with varying types of relations between them. What they shared, however, was the belief that Islam was the religion of their ancestors and the most viable religious and political worldview for them. They set up places of worship, newsletters, food co-ops and classes.

Their presence in the black community also had influence regarding dress, language, and demeanor, a shunning of alcohol and drugs, and dietary habits.

The Nation of Islam's roots

THE birth of the Nation of Islam, which is often considered as one of the major beginnings for Islam in America, took place in the 1930s along with the development of a Sunni community in New York City under the tutelage of Sheikh Daoud Faisal. Sheikh Faisal welcomed both indigenous black and immigrant believers to his *masjid* (mosque) and largely sought little attention for his movement, preferring to stay out of the limelight.

The Nation's ideology, on the other hand, focused on an Islamic identity, but in racial terms: black pride and self-help. It inherited roots laid down by African-Americans' earlier drives to develop links with Africa and with Islam. But it was also born at a time of great religious and social upheaval for white and black Americans. It was a time littered with "prophets" making all kinds of claims about religious traditions as the Great Depression spawned a hunger for explanations and hope.

By the 1930s, while most of those in the ex-slave community had accepted the label "Negro" over the previous designation of "colored," some resisted the artificiality of the term and were called radicals.

Contrary to popular belief, for several decades the Nation used the Ahmadiyyah English translation of the Qur'an along with books on the teachings of Elijah Muhammad. But the Nation of Islam added to basic Muslim tenets, such as belief in Allah, His Prophet Muhammad, angels, books, and the fundamental practices of prayer, fasting,

charity and the performance of the *hajj* or pilgrimage. This made the movement heretical in the eyes of traditional Muslims.

For example, in the early years of the Nation, there was the belief that Allah came in the person of W.D. Fard, or Master Fard Muhammad as he is known within the movement. Fard is considered the founder of the Nation of Islam in 1930. But there are not many details about him, let alone his roots. He mysteriously disappeared in 1934 and Elijah Muhammad became his successor. Today, allusions to Fard are largely kept within the community as the Nation, in many of its practices, has periodically moved closer to traditional Islam.

In a few of the discourses of W.D. Muhammad (the son of Elijah Mohammed) in the 1980s, however, he claims to have met Fard while he was living in California. W.D. Mohammed took over the movement in 1975 when his father Elijah Mohammed died.

Other practices were also altered. From early on, members of the Nation of Islam were urged to fast during the month of December, in order to avoid falling prey to what they saw as the consumerism of the Christmas holiday. There was and continues to be a belief in the evilness of white people based on slavery, the Jim Crow system and continued patterns of racial discrimination. Traditional Islam does not accept changes in the basic practices, nor teaching that white people are evil.

Although it is widely believed that the Nation of Islam spread mainly in the prison system, it grew equally in black communities. The beliefs, dietary habits, and work and study habits of the Nation

produced a number of physicians, dentists, engineers, university professors and administrators, along with entrepreneurs.

The Nation's rhetorical war with government policies, outspoken criticism of discrimination against blacks, and growing friction with the Jewish community have kept the Nation of Islam in the spotlight.

The Nation of Islam's impact on African-Americans

THE rhetoric of Malcolm X from the late 1950s on into the 1960s provided a direct challenge to the Civil Rights Movement and its leaders. He derided civil non-violence in the face of white violence and disavowed the idea of integrating with white America.

Malcolm X broke with the Nation of Islam for a number of reasons, among them the discovery of alleged sexual misconduct on the part of Elijah Muhammad. He then further engaged in traditional Islam, establishing a mosque in New York City and disavowing the Nation of Islam's racial views.

Malcolm X changed his views after he undertook the *hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca), when he saw that Islam is a religion for all humans, and not race-specific.

He started his own Islamic school of thought that drew more from the global idea of Islam as an inclusive religion that is not specific to the African-American community, and he started seeing African-American issues in a different light, unrelated to religion, in the context of race relations and as an injustice specific to American society. He was

assassinated in 1965 after numerous attempts on his life, an event that cemented his teachings in the African-American community.

Manning Marable, a scholar who studied Malcolm X's life, offered these insights in a [2007 interview](#) with the program *Democracy Now!*

MANNING MARABLE: I think that Malcolm X was the most remarkable historical figure produced by Black America in the 20th century. That's a heavy statement, but I think that in his 39 short years of life, Malcolm came to symbolize black urban America, its culture, its politics, its militancy, its outrage against structural racism, and at the end of his life, a broad internationalist vision of emancipatory power far better than any other single individual, that he shared with Dubois and Paul Robeson a pan-Africanist internationalist perspective. He shared with Marcus Garvey a commitment to building strong black institutions. He shared with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., a commitment to peace and the freedom of racialized minorities. He was the first prominent American to attack and to criticize the U.S. role in Southeast Asia, and he came out foursquare against the Vietnam War in 1964, long before the vast majority of Americans did. So that Malcolm X represents the cutting edge of a kind of critique of globalization in the 21st century. And in fact, Malcolm, if anything, was far ahead of the curve in so many ways.

Soon after the 1975 death of Elijah Muhammad, who led the Nation of Islam almost from its beginning, the community was divided. Warith Deen Muhammad, the son of Elijah Muhammad, led

one group. He struggled to bring the community closer to traditional Islam and to erase many of the beliefs considered antithetical to Islam. He passed away in 2008. Louis Farrakhan, likewise came forward after Elijah Muhammad's death and sought to keep the Nation of Islam in the same spirit as when it was founded. But both efforts have stumbled.

Other Muslim immigrants

AFRICAN-AMERICANS were not the only ones to bring Islam to America either through conversion or by staying linked to the religion they knew in Africa.

Muslim immigration to the U.S. in the early 20th century was largely composed of Muslims from Eastern Europe and collapsing fragments of the Ottoman Empire. Many of them came from Lebanon and Syria and other parts of the empire that had once sprawled across most of the Middle East and large parts of Eastern Europe.

But anti-immigrant sentiment in the 1920s penalized Muslims, along with others who did not fit into the population laws that favored Western Europeans. Muslim immigration virtually came to a halt in the following decades.

The gates were thrown open with the passage in 1965 of a law that swept away national quotas for immigration. In many cases, Muslims came to the U.S. fleeing political, social or economic crises as never before.

Out of the long-term Israeli-Arab crisis, there has been a flow of

Palestinians. From the Iranian revolution in 1979 came refugees fleeing life under Ayatollah Khomeini's regime. Unrest and upheavals in Lebanon, Afghanistan, Eastern Europe, Africa, and the former Soviet Union added to the waves of Muslims seeking new lives in the U.S.

At the same time, the U.S. became a magnet for Muslims in search of better education, new careers, and new businesses. Muslim physicians, for example, responded to the nation's need for their services.

For some of these immigrants, the U.S. offered unparalleled freedom to practice their religion — a freedom that they may not have enjoyed in their own country because they belonged to a different sect or because they were a minority.

Many of the earlier immigrants settled where they could find work and so set down roots in rural America. When the immigration law changed, the new arrivals tended to settle more often in urban areas. Mirroring national trends, the Muslim population has been shifting towards the south.

Older, small Muslim communities suddenly expanded with the arrival of the new immigrants. Detroit, which had an old established population made up mostly of Yemenis and Lebanese, expanded greatly with the arrival of Palestinians, Iraqis and yet more Lebanese fleeing long-term upheavals.

Many Bosnian Muslims escaping from the warfare that raged in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s found new homes in Chicago, which had one of the earliest Muslim communities, created by Bosnians at the start of the 20th century.

The same expansion of Muslim communities that took place in New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles was matched by expanding communities in Texas, Oklahoma, and Florida.

So, too, as Muslim immigrants set down their roots and their financial links grew, they were able to reach out to relatives to unite families.

Finding a voice and place in American society

As a number of studies have shown, Muslims in the U.S. are no different from any other religious group. There are strong associations between participating in mosque-related activities and the creation of a civically and politically engaged community in the U.S.

This is consistent with other religious traditions, where a higher participation rate in church is strongly associated with a higher level of civic and political participation in local communities and U.S. politics.

Out of the Muslim American Public Opinion Survey come these insights into Muslims today in the U.S.:

- More religious Muslims are more likely than other Muslims to follow election news.
- More religious Muslims, as compared to other Muslims, believe more overwhelmingly that Islam is compatible with political participation in the U.S.

Within Muslim society, however, the Pew survey in 2007 found some differences and frustrations. These findings include:

- Only 13 percent of African-American Muslims felt satisfied with conditions in the U.S. as compared to 29 percent for native-born Muslims and 45 percent for Muslim immigrants.
- Muslims under 30 years old are more religiously observant and more accepting of Islamic extremism than older Muslims.
- Among Muslims under 30 years old, 42 percent thought there is a conflict between their faith and modern life as compared to 28 percent for older Muslims.

Islam and political engagement in America

As more Muslims came to the U.S. in the later years of 20th century, they brought beliefs that reflected the religious awakenings taking place across the Muslim world. Students from the Muslim world, studying at U.S. universities, found a freedom that did not exist in many countries. And students and movements felt that they needed to spread their beliefs to the expanding number of Muslims in America.

Supporters of the Egyptian-born Muslim Brotherhood, for example, sought to spread their beliefs, as did members from other sects and movements across the Muslim world. Groups such as the Ahmadiyyah found in America a tolerance that was not accorded them in some parts of the Muslim world.

Alongside the competition between Muslim groups from across

the globe, a search took place among some to identify how they wanted to live a religious life in the U.S. This search for identity has spawned debate and discussion among Muslims

Where there had been only a handful of Muslim organizations in the U.S. at the start of the 20th century, more recently there has been a steadily growing number, reflecting the increasing number and spread of Muslims in the U.S.

They represent diverse communities and individuals, from women to professionals to youths. Two of the largest organizations are the Islamic Society of North America, which represents a number of Muslim groups and the Islamic Circle of North America. The Muslim Public Affairs Council, formed in 1988, focuses on encouraging political and civic involvement on the part of Muslims.

While the majority of Muslim Americans (64 percent) say they are registered to vote, this is the lowest percentage among the religious groups studied, according to the 2009 survey by the Gallup Organization. The MAPOS study shows that 28 percent of Muslims subscribe to “none” as their political affiliations and many of those who left the ranks of the Republican Party did not join another party, due to their feeling of isolation in American politics.

There are many groups that address anti-Muslim postures in the U.S. One of the most prominent is the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), which acts to protect Muslims’ civil rights. It uses its position as a national organization to speak out against anti-Muslim discrimination and prejudice.

There has been change within these groups as well. They have learned to better tell their stories and more effectively explain Islam to non-Muslims. They have sought to organize and bring Muslims into politics and civil society. They have sought coalitions to expand their bases and to help amplify their voices.

Consider the example of IMAN and this story about it.

IMAN stands for Inner-City Muslim Action Network, begun by young Muslims in a storefront in a working-class Arab neighborhood in Chicago in the 1990s. One of its first steps was to reach out to African-Americans living nearby. And it has continued bridge building as it has grown to become a major organization. Speaking out against blight in poor neighborhoods, it has linked up with Christian and Jewish activists. Here is [a story from *The National*](#), the English-language paper from Abu Dhabi, which explains [IMAN's](#) growth:

On a cool, grey April morning on Chicago's South Side, Rami Nashashibi walked purposefully into the conference room of the Inner-City Muslim Action Network (IMAN) and sat at the head of a rectangular table, where four of his charges awaited instruction.

"I can't explain how much you have on your shoulders," Nashashibi, wearing loose-fitting jeans, a knitted skullcap and a comfortable sweater, told his men. "What we have right now is a little seed, and if we want that seed to become a great forest, we've got to cultivate it."

Nashashibi has been cultivating Iman for nearly 15 years. Today the organization provides just about everything to those in need in Chicago Lawn, a predominantly African-American neighborhood with a mix of Latinos and Palestinians. Its free clinic serves the sick from across the city. A computer lab offers technical training. Tens of thousands of people go to its annual concert benefit, *Takin' It to the Streets*, while its bimonthly music and arts gatherings are well attended. One project supports healthier eating alternatives for the area; another reduces gang violence. A new initiative, *Green Reentry*, builds eco-friendly houses for Muslims recently released from prison.

Iman's work has earned plaudits for its leader. In 2007, *Islamica* magazine placed Nashashibi among the 10 Young Muslim Visionaries Shaping Islam in America. The next year he was named one of the world's 500 most influential Muslims by Georgetown University and described as "the most impressive young Muslim of my generation" by Eboo Patel, chairman of President Barack Obama's interfaith task force. Last autumn, the U.S. state department sent Nashashibi on a diplomatic speaking tour of Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia.

For Muslim Americans, the drive to speak out, to debate, and to question public attitudes has opened the way for a number of new voices. Here is a *New York Times* story about [Muslim women](#) gaining a higher profile in the U.S. But the story segues into an interesting precedent for Muslim women when it talks about Ingrid Mattson.

Perhaps the most noticed figure among American Muslim women is Ingrid Mattson. In a bright-red jumper and multicolored head scarf, she stood out among the gray-haired clerics in black who gathered in Washington in September to try and defuse the anger over the planned mosque near the World Trade Center site in New York.

Ms. Mattson, who is 47 and teaches at the Hartford Seminary in Connecticut, became the first woman to head the Islamic Society of North America, one of the largest Muslim associations on the continent.

She was first elected vice president on Sept. 4, 2001, then president in 2006, a position she held until September; those years were so full of sound and fury over all things Muslim that gender took a back seat.

“But what happened on Sept. 11 and after has led American Muslims to be more involved in civic society,” Ms. Mattson said, “and Muslim women were finding that a very rich area for activity.”

“The only area where there’s a limitation is religious leadership — the imam,” she added, predicting that “we will have some communities in the future that have female imams.”

Islam and conversion

AS the case of Ingrid Matson demonstrates, converts play a significant role among American Muslims. It is estimated that converts account for about 15 percent of mosque membership, a figure that has not changed over several decades, according to the Mosque Survey.

They often bring a nuanced perspective to their new religion. Here, for example, is a *Los Angeles Times* profile of a [Muslim convert](#) and an imam who talks about how he sees his religion adapting to life in the U.S.:

The sermon is typical of Webb, a charismatic Oklahoma-born convert to Islam with a growing following among American Muslims, especially the young. He sprinkles his public addresses with as many pop culture references as Koranic verses and sayings from the prophet. He says it helps him connect with his mainly U.S.-born flock.

“Are we going to reach them with an Arab message or with a Pakistani message? Or are we going to reach them with an American message?” asks Webb, 38, of Santa Clara. He is a resident scholar and educator with the Bay Area chapter of the nonprofit Muslim American Society, but reaches others in lectures and through his popular website, which he calls a “virtual mosque.”

Webb is at the forefront of a movement to create an American-style Islam, one that is true to the Qur’an and Islamic law but that reflects this country’s customs and culture. Known for his laid-back style, he has helped promote the idea that Islam is open to a modern American interpretation. At times, his approach seems almost sacrilegious.

Anti-Muslim sentiments

LIKE many minorities, Muslims have faced discrimination. From African-American Muslims to other American converts to immi-

grants, many Muslims have felt the pain of intolerance. In cinema and literature, Muslims have continually complained about painful stereotypes. On the screen, the image of the Muslim Arab has typically been a terrifying one. It's an image of a dangerous and violent person, someone strange to U.S. society, and a danger to the world.

Anti-Muslim sentiment has traditionally swelled at moments when Muslim world events were negatively received in the U.S.

Thus anti-Muslim feelings spiraled in the 1970s, with the oil shocks when the OPEC nations limited production of oil, severely affecting the American economy. The 1979 Iranian revolution and the hostage crisis led to a much stronger anti-Muslim sentiment, where Muslims were seen as individuals who fundamentally have ideas that are at odds with America, socially and politically.

Most of these anti-Muslim feelings come from lack of knowledge, and a worldview that sees all Muslims as the same, whether Sunni or a Shia, from the Middle East, South Asia, or the U.S.

Since the events of September 11, 2001, anti-Muslim feelings have intensified, leading to efforts to introduce preemptive anti-*sharia* legislation in various states in the U.S. Likewise, Congressional hearings were held by U.S. Rep. Peter King (R-NY), which scrutinized the Muslim American community and its potential ties to terrorism.

An example of the tension was the controversy over the Park 51 project, a proposed Islamic cultural center to be built in lower Manhattan, which led to a nationwide outcry, given its proximity to "Ground Zero," the site of the World Trade Center in New York City.

Mosque proposals have been challenged in various cities and towns around the United States, such as Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

American Muslims in the shadow of the 9/11 tragedies

FOR many American Muslims, al-Qaeda's attacks on the U.S. in 2001 were life-changing events. Many feared a backlash and, indeed, there was a spike in hate crimes. More than one out of four Muslims interviewed in the Pew Research Center's 2011 survey said people had treated them with suspicion. More than half said life has become more difficult for them since 2001, according to the survey. Some have become more guarded emotionally and physically, hurt by the hostility and puzzled by officials' increased security focus on Muslims.

Some decided to be more outspoken about their religion and place in American society. Some felt the need to extend their arms to others in search of support and confirmation of their commitment to the U.S. And yet others questioned U.S. policies in the Muslim world and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Despite officials' denials, they reacted to the public image that the U.S. was not at war with terror groups but rather with Islam.

Many worried about the fate of Muslim charities after federal officials cited several for supporting organizations allegedly linked to foreign terror groups. A handful of organizations were closed as a result, and individuals were prosecuted. Muslim groups said the government's actions harmed donations. Muslim groups joined with civil rights organizations to challenging the government's actions.

The American Civil Liberties Union, in a report on the government's actions against Muslim charities wrote: "These policies and practices are neither fair nor effective, and are undermining American values of due process and fairness."

How do you tell these stories?

THE shock and horror of the 9/11 events prompted many to speak out in condemnation. Here, for example, Khalid Abu Fadh, a scholar at UCLA and outspoken author on Islam in the West, expressed his strong rejection of the events soon after the attacks in an interview with the [PBS program Frontline](#).

"Something in my heart just told me that I know it's going to turn out to be someone who believes himself a Muslim to have done this. I wept for a good hour. It was so much suffering.

"As a professor who teaches in this field, and as a Muslim who is committed to this religion, for it to all to come to this. It wasn't just that I was crying about the planes or the fear or the anxiety.... I was crying over what has happened to Muslim civilization. Where are we now? I was crying over the fate of something that I love dearly, and that is Islam."

When the 10th anniversary of 9/11 came around, it presented another chance to measure how Muslims see their situation. Here is a [story from the Tampa Tribune](#) that shows sensitivity to this issue as it looks at the impact of the anti-Muslim sentiment on teens.

TAMPA — The specter of Osama bin Laden and the Sept. 11 attacks defined an entire generation of young Americans.

It was especially brutal for Freedom High School student Usama bin Urfi, who was verbally bullied because of his name.

“My self-esteem went way down,” bin Urfi, 16, said. “bin Laden ruined the name. He ruined the name of Islam.”

The harassment was so severe that bin Urfi started going by the nickname “Daniel.” But he was still picked on because of his Pakistani heritage.

“They were saying I was a terrorist and I should go back to my country,” he said. “I was shy around everyone. I was socially awkward. I couldn’t talk to anyone.”

Growing up during the war on terror wasn’t easy, people of his generation say. Being raised in the Islamic faith, in the shadow of terrorism still lingering since the World Trade Center towers fell, is even harder.

It became increasingly clear to American Muslims after the 9/11 tragedies that they needed to raise their voices in defense of Islam, and especially to make their views available to the news media.

WNYC, a public broadcasting station in New York City, touched on this by visiting a news media training session for Muslims. [The program](#) included this reporting:

Some of the attendees said they feel under siege as practicing Muslims, and they feared things won’t get any

better until they learn to represent themselves, and their faith, more effectively. In recent months, they've watched as critics of Islam have successfully raised doubts about Muslims and Muslim institutions, most notably Park 51, also known as the Ground Zero Mosque.

Consider the coverage of Muslim efforts in the Detroit area to improve their public image. This article from the local AOL Patch site talks about a movie being shot in predominantly Muslim Dearborn, Michigan. Notice that the article begins by talking about someone outside the community. This is an interesting device to bring readers into the story.

When local photographer Michael Shamus was approached about working on a film that would capture the story of Fordson High School's football team and the players, families and community behind it, he was admittedly skeptical.

A film about Arab-Americans? It had been attempted many times before, and had never quite worked out as planned.

"I told [the filmmakers] they were going to have a tough time doing this, because people have tried to tell this story before and it's never come out quite right," explains Shamus, a 25-year veteran of Michigan photojournalism and videography. "The community's never really been happy with it. But most of them are tall, blonde guys in yellow ties trying to tell the rest of the world what the Muslim community is like."

"Not this time."

One result of the Muslim experience post-9/11 has been greater story telling through the arts. Here is an article about a woman who wrote a play looking at the lives of five Muslim women. Again, notice how the writer, Manya A. Brachear, a religion reporter for the *Chicago Tribune*, digs into the [core of her story](#), as the playwright explains the event that touched her life — the 9/11 tragedies. Brachear writes:

“When I was a teen, I thought my skin color, my religion, my heritage, would prevent me from being a part of the American theater experience,” said Malik, now 34 and a mother of four. “Now, young Muslims ask me the same things I used to ask myself: ‘Can a Muslim be a theater artist?’ I tell them ... ‘Focus on your craft, and leave the rest to God.’”

As the American Muslim community faces more scrutiny — from hearings on Capitol Hill to hostile neighbors who don’t want them worshipping next door — Malik draws on the confidence she gained in high school to set aside her self-consciousness to fulfill her dream.

On June 13, the Goodman Theatre will host a reading of her newest play, “The Mecca Tales,” a script commissioned by the Goodman that examines why five Muslim women have decided to make the once-in-a-lifetime pilgrimage to Mecca at this particular time in their lives.

In addition, her play “Unveiled,” about five fictional Muslim women who find their inner strength when confronted by prejudice and pressure after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, is being translated for audiences in France,

where Muslim headscarves have been banned for women working in the public sector.

“Muslims are human beings, they are like everybody else,” she said. “I want my writing to show that.”

For her story’s ending, Brachear lets the playwright talk again about the meaning of her work, and her words become a sounding board for others. Here is how the story concludes:

While “Unveiled” is being prepared for a stage in France, she especially wants to introduce the play to a New York audience on the 10th anniversary of the terrorist attacks. One colleague recently suggested it would be the wrong time and New Yorkers wouldn’t listen.

Malik disagreed.

“I think they will,” she said. “I would love for my play to be part of the dialogue.”

Let’s go over some points

KEEP in mind some ideas raised here as you report on Muslims in America.

- Remember that the American Muslim community is one of the nation’s most diverse, so avoid sweeping generalizations about Muslims. At the same time, help explain the social, religious and cultural differences by exploring them in your reporting.

- American Muslims strongly affirm their links to their faith. But there are marked differences among sects and movements that reflect deep historic and cultural roots. American Muslims differ, as well, on how they practice their faith. This produces self-descriptions such “progressive,” “moderate,” and “conservative.”
- The 9/11 tragedies placed great pressures on the Muslim community. It reinforced the community’s need to explain itself and to find inter-faith allies. It brought together Muslims of diverse roots.
- This is a not an easy narrative. Nor is it a story stuck in time and told only once. As the community continues to change and develop, you need to stay in stay informed so you can inform others.



Reporter's Notebook: Covering Domestic Terrorism

By Bryan Denson



A TEXT message popped onto my cell phone from Oregon's top federal prosecutor late one Friday in November 2010.

"Will need to speak

with you in next few hrs," wrote Dwight Holton. "Are you avail?" As the federal courts writer for *The Oregonian*, I often get story tips from lawyers, government agents, and the occasional judge. But the U.S. attorney calling well after quitting time on a Friday meant I could probably kiss my weekend goodbye.

"I'm ready in five minutes," I wrote, and Holton replied, "I won't be able to talk for 60–90 mins."

Three hours later I sat down with Holton and his minions in a courthouse conference room in downtown Portland and learned that 10 minutes before his first text message, the FBI had arrested a 19-year-old college student in an attempted terrorist attack six blocks from my office. The government accused Mohamed Osman Mohamud of dialing

a cell phone to detonate a van full of explosives at Pioneer Courthouse Square, where thousands were gathered for the city's annual Christmas tree lighting. But the bomb, presented to the Somali-American by undercover FBI operatives posing as jihadists, was a harmless fake.

The arrest opened a local portal into the FBI's domestic war on terrorism and fears that U.S. followers of Islam were being radicalized into plotting terrorist attacks on American soil. Mohamud was one of 193 Muslim Americans indicted in terrorist plots between September 11, 2001, and February 2012, according to an annual report published by the Triangle Center on Terrorism and Homeland Security. Many of the suspects, including Mohamud, were arrested by the FBI after elaborate sting operations.

Government prosecutors say the stings, which employ undercover operatives playing the parts of Muslim extremists, prevent terrorists from making good on plans to kill Americans. But criminal defense lawyers describe the operations as a new brand of profiling that entraps ordinary Muslims, guilty of little more than talking about waging *jihad*, in crimes created by the FBI.

The colliding points of view and the community's revulsion over the case offered *The Oregonian's* staff real-time lessons in how little we knew about Islam, Portland's close-knit Somali community, and the FBI's mounting terrorism stings. Covering Mohamud's arrest, the subsequent firebombing of a mosque where he prayed, and court proceedings complicated by classified documents, made me feel as if I were a correspondent in another country. In three decades as a

reporter, I had covered only two national security cases. My Arabic amounted to little more than “I’m an American journalist” (uttered once, at gunpoint, after I showed up unannounced at a police station in Baghdad). And nearly everything I knew about Somalia came from watching the movie, *Black Hawk Down*.

My learning curve was steep, and I wasn’t alone. Colleagues Lynne Terry and Helen Jung also found themselves tackling complicated legal, cultural, and religious issues raised by the Mohamud case and an ACLU lawsuit on behalf of Muslims grounded by the government’s no-fly list. Here’s some advice from our reporting experience.

- **Visit a mosque.** Cultivate relationships with imams and other religious leaders the way you might cultivate CEOs and stock analysts on the business beat. While many Muslims have grown to mistrust journalists (not surprising since we often go to them only after arrests), some are open to sharing their faith as a form of public outreach. Before you go, be aware that some Muslim leaders don’t shake hands with women who aren’t related to them; and it’s advisable for women to cover their heads when entering mosques. Also, do a little reading. An excellent primer is John L. Esposito’s *What Everyone Needs to Know About Islam* (Oxford University Press, 2011).
- **Find a translator or religious scholar.** Court filings in the Mohamud case were choked with Arabic phrases. For

example, the FBI intercepted emails between Mohamud and a suspected terrorist in the Middle East in which they spoke of Umrah (a pilgrimage to Mecca, in Saudi Arabia) and Mohamud's dream to see the Kaaba (a sacred building in Mecca). The coded exchange, the FBI alleged, was intended disguise Mohamud's dream of flying to Yemen and becoming "a martyr in the highest chambers of paradise."

- **Prepare for reporting obstacles.** Many U.S. Muslims, feeling vulnerable since 9/11, won't talk with reporters. Defense lawyers typically forbid defendants and their families to give interviews. Lynne Terry, shut down from any contact with Mohamud's family, profiled him by pursuing members of a Somali group, visiting the large Portland mosque where he and his family sometimes worshipped, and talking with neighbors. Her compelling write-around described Mohamud's early life in war-torn Somalia and how his father, an Intel software engineer, grew so worried that his son was being brainwashed by jihadists that he sought help from the FBI.
- **Learn entrapment law.** Lawyers for Muslims accused in the FBI's terrorism stings often mount entrapment defenses. Under the law, it is the government's burden to prove its agents did not plant the notion of a crime in the

mind of a suspect and did not induce their target to carry it out. It's not hard to find academics conversant with entrapment law. But for perspective you might consider reaching out to the Center on Law and Security at New York University School of Law, which publishes reports on FBI stings in which undercover operatives pose as terrorists. The entrapment defense has never succeeded in keeping the target of a sting operation out of prison as of May 2012.

- **Study national security laws.** You'll be caught flatfooted in federal court hearings if you don't understand two important laws known as FISA and CIPA. The Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) permits a secretive court to sign warrants for eavesdropping on suspected terrorists and spies. The Classified Information Procedures Act (CIPA) prevents disclosure of government secrets, such as open terrorism cases, by limiting the number of people privy to classified information. Your best sources of information on these laws are lawyers who have tried national security cases.



The Politics of the “Islam Beat”

By Jonathan Lyons



THE American public’s low level of knowledge about the Muslim world places a special burden on today’s journalist, who must negotiate complex terrain through longstanding religious rivalry, historical grievances, political antagonisms, and social differences.

As with any beat, covering Islam and the Muslims effectively comes down to some familiar basics. These include: story selection, identification of sources, decisions of omission and commission, and presentation.

At the same time, the “Islam beat” carries with it a number of unique, and hidden, challenges for stakeholders — reporters, editors, advertisers, or sponsors, and, of course, the readers. In short, all four

elements of the Islam beat are shaped by 1,000 years of history between the West and the world of Islam.

The reporter in the field, whether covering Muslims here in the United States or on foreign assignment, needs to be aware of the historical forces, ideas, and assumptions that shape majority Western attitudes toward the Muslim community, or *ummah*.

Unseen and unacknowledged, these ideas and assumptions nevertheless shape the politics of the Islam beat, that is, the environment in which media professionals operate every day. Many of these same assumptions are embedded in our everyday language. Yet they act as significant barriers to successful reporting, and thus to better understanding of important world events.

An analysis of the challenges and potential pitfalls inherent to the Islam beat can heighten awareness of the broader context at work among reporters, photojournalists, cameramen, editors, and other media practitioners as they carry out their professional duties and responsibilities.

Before proceeding further, it is important to note that what follows addresses only contemporary, Western attitudes and ideas of Islam and their historical sources and development. It makes no attempt to address Muslim perceptions of Western traditions and societies.

The reason is two-fold. First, this chapter and the others in this volume are aimed specifically at Western media professionals. Second, the topic of Muslim attitudes and ideas of the West is widely,

although often superficially, covered in many other sources, while far too little attention has been paid to the other direction.

The Western 'idea' of Islam

THE first Western encounters with the Muslims date to the eighth and ninth century and initially involved border raids, coastal incursions, and pirate attacks on shipping by Arab forces on the periphery of Europe. The earliest Western chronicles paint the Muslim Arabs as just another barbarian nuisance, not unlike the pagan Vikings.

Not even the sacking of St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome in 846 or the gradual conquest of the Iberian Peninsula by Arabs and Berbers from North Africa altered this view. In fact, the historical record suggests that indifference toward Muslims existed for centuries. There was even some early recognition in Europe of the idea — shared by most students of religion today — that the One God of the Jews, Christians, and Muslims is essentially one and the same. Ritual, practice, and specific doctrines differ, of course, but there is also much common ground.

All that began to change, however, with the declaration by Pope Urban II of the First Crusade in 1095, when European armies were exhorted to conquer Muslim-controlled territories in the Holy Land, now claimed as rightfully Christian. Muslims immediately took on a specific ideological role as the ultimate enemy of Christendom, and the notion that the two faiths worshipped the same deity was effec-

tively dismissed. From now on, the Muslims would be imbued with qualities in direct opposition to Christian values.

Chief among these were the notions of Islam as irrational; spread by the sword and maintained by force; and sexually perverse and abusive toward women. Muslims were also said to be followers of a false prophet and practitioners of idolatry — this latter notion anathema to the tenets of the faith. The historical attributes assigned to the Muslims can be summarized in the following table, in opposition to their perceived Christian counterparts.

The medieval discourse: Islam as the 'inverse' of Christianity

Hate, Violence		Peace, Love
Falsehood		Truth
Perversion		Chastity
Anti-Christ		Christ

The accusations include the popular sentiment that Islam harbors a jealous rage toward the West, its freedoms, and way of life, and that Muslims are unsuited to democratic institutions, science, and

modernity in general. Here, too, the Muslim East is placed in direct opposition to the Judeo-Christian West.

It is important to bear in mind that all of these elements had their origins as wartime propaganda, dating to beginning of the Crusades in the late 11th century, and were created without reference to specific Muslim ideas or practice, all of which remained opaque to Europe. No one was even sure how to identify the Muslims, or where they came from. Instead, a jumble of names often drawn from biblical history was applied, interchangeably, to these new foes: Saracens, Ishmaelites, Hagarenes, Arabs, Persians, and Turks. The modern English terms *Muslim* and *Islam* appear only in the 17th century.

In other words, the West had had no direct experience or knowledge of Muslim beliefs, practices, and lifestyles at the time that it established its comprehensive vision of Islam as a deadly, existential, and essentially immutable threat. These same perceptions remain more or less in force today, despite a millennium of direct experience and engagement — commercial, military, theological, political, and journalistic — with the world of Islam.

Hearing Muslim voices

IN the early 12th century, well after the launch of the First Crusade, one of Europe's most powerful figures lamented that Christians could not engage the Muslims in theological debate because no one in the West knew anything about Islam. He set out to address this by

commissioning the first Latin translation of the Qur'an. Yet, the effort was a failure, in large part because both the translators and their patron brought to bear all of the prevailing negative ideas of Islam. In short, they did not allow Islam to speak for itself.

This crude translation, really more of a rough paraphrase dotted with derogatory comments and gross distortions of Muslim beliefs, only served to reinforce the prevailing Western idea of Islam. Later translations avoided some of the more egregious errors but nonetheless fell victim to many of the same forces and influences. For example, the preface to the first English-language version, by George Sale in 1734, refers to the Prophet Muhammad as a “criminal” and attributes the success of this “false” faith exclusively to reliance on coercion and violence.

The Age of Enlightenment saw a further hardening of the Western view of Islam. Philosophers, writers, and essayists used their shared critiques of the Muslim world as a vehicle for biting commentary on their own societies. Montesquieu devoted his best-selling novel *The Persian Letters* to the notion of Eastern despotism, violence, and the sexual exploitation of women. Hegel, the influential German philosopher, meanwhile dismissed Muslims as bereft of history and unable to achieve anything of lasting value.

The heyday of Western study of the Islamic world, spanning much of the 19th century as an adjunct to colonial expansion on the part of France, Great Britain, and other European powers into what was widely known as “the Orient,” further complicated the issue. The

influential field of philology, the study of language, claimed for itself the power to understand and interpret foreign cultures through mastery of their texts. Textual analysis took precedence over direct observation or first-hand experience.

Many among this rising generation of Western experts on Islam conveniently avoided the hardships of foreign travel, for they were convinced that the sacred texts and legal writings of the Muslims contained everything they needed to know about the Islamic world. In fact, where personal observation on the ground challenged or undermined textual evidence, this was generally discarded in favor of the latter. The net effect, then, was to ignore what it is that the Muslims actually say or do, or even what they say they mean, and to rely instead on a handful of texts, selected and then interpreted by distant Western experts.

Images of Islam

THIS was even true among the European artists, writers, and travelers drawn to the Orient in the 19th and early 20th centuries for inspiration or adventure. Many created their own images of the Muslims before they set off and then disregarded anything that did not fit that vision. These were then conveyed to society at large. Here, for example, are the words of the popular French writer Gustave Flaubert as he presented his readers with his view from the Great Pyramid:

But lift your head. Look! Look! And you will see cities with domes of gold and minarets of porcelain, palaces of lava built on plinths of alabaster, marble-rimmed pools where sultanas bathe their bodies at the hour when the moon makes bluer the shadows of the groves and more limpid the silvery water of the fountains. Open your eyes! Open your eyes!

In truth, this passage was written four years before Flaubert ever set foot in the Middle East. When his own images and desires could not be met by the realities of life in the Orient, Flaubert hired Egyptian prostitutes to fulfill his fantasies of the Oriental woman.

Another celebrated French author complained that the Oriental cafes back in Paris were more authentic than those he found in Egypt, and he carried out much of his research in a French-run library in Cairo, rather than among real, living Egyptians. Here, too, we can see the persistent tendency to reduce the idea of the Muslim world to its perceived cultural attributes, rather than to engage seriously in its internal social, political, and religious life.

Parallels to this historical precedent remain all too visible in today's media coverage. Where the Islam experts of old were Church ideologues, Enlightenment thinkers, or Orientalist philologists, today this same role is filled by news commentators, television talking heads, and legions of terrorism consultants, authors, and academics. Like the novelist Flaubert, many bring their own embedded ideas of what awaits and then proceed to find exactly that.

The use and abuse of language

WHATEVER the format — print, video, radio, online, or multi-media — the basic building blocks of journalism remain grounded in language. Thus, the language of Western coverage of Islam deserves particular attention. And it is here that we can see clearly the ways in which our deeply embedded ideas of Islam are advanced and perpetuated, at the expense of fresh, clear-eyed coverage, by the terminology common to our reportage.

A number of the terms most often found throughout media reports on Islam and the Muslims have all been divorced from their actual meaning in the course of adoption by the West. Their uncritical usage, then, tends not to illuminate, enlighten, or otherwise enhance news coverage but to obscure or undermine it.

The chart on the next page compares the “common law” definitions of some of the more prevalent terms, as generally understood in contemporary reportage, with their actual meaning, and the context of their development. The fourth column briefly spells out the net effect of such usage.

Perhaps the most far-reaching, if least obvious, is the persistent use of the Arabic word *Allah* in reference to God. This convention, apparently designed to impart some sort of authenticity, tends to obscure the fact that, in the opinion of most modern scholars or religion experts, the three major monotheistic faiths — Judaism, Christianity, and Islam — all recognize and worship the same, one deity, signified

Terms used in reporting on Islam in the West

Term	"Common Law" Meaning	Actual Meaning	Effect
Allah	God of the Muslims	Arabic word for "God," also used by Christians and Jews	Promotes division among faiths
Fatwa	Religious decree sanctioning violence	Any religious ruling on the conduct of a proper Muslim life	Makes violence inherent to Islam
Jihad	Holy war against the West	Various forms of struggle for the good of the faith	Makes violence inherent to Islam
Madrasa	School for <i>jihad</i>	Arabic, literally a center for learning	Makes violence inherent to Islam
Fundamentalist	Muslim seeking return to days of Prophet Muhammad	19th-century term for American Christians 'returning' to teachings of the Bible	Applies the Western experience to Islam

in English by the word "God." In this context, it is interesting to note that since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, American evangelicals have openly stepped back from their earlier, general agreement that the God of the Christians and Muslims was one and the same.

Historically, theologically, and culturally, this God is one and the same for all three, a fact literally "lost in translation" when the term *Allah* is used indiscriminately. Moreover, the Arabic word Allah pre-dates Islam and is often used to this day as the word for God by Christians and Jews in the Middle East. It is worth asking, whether a reporter covering religious issues in France, for example, would use the term *Dieu* in place of God. Probably not.

Jihad is discussed in detail elsewhere in this volume. However,

it is worth noting here that its meaning within the context of Islam is not fixed but rather varies markedly across different eras, in different locales, and within varying traditions and schools of thought. Further complications arise from the fact that the popular Western notion of *jihad* as a religious duty to carry out holy war has been co-opted by today's violent militant groups, the so-called *jihadis*.

Likewise, the terms *fatwa*, *madrassa*, and fundamentalist have deeply embedded meanings that tend to confuse and conflate rather than enhance news coverage. All such terms should be used with care and within their historical context and meaning, not their “common law” definition.

Who speaks for Islam?

THIS question has confounded observers for a millennium, in large measure because of profound misunderstandings of Islamic teachings, history, and culture. Here, too, the model can be traced back to Europe of the late 11th century, drawing heavily on the hierarchical structure and practice of the Catholic Church. While Muslim values were presented as mirror opposites of Christian ones, the notion of a centralized, top-down faith, with an idealized unity of doctrine and practice, was borrowed from contemporary Catholic theory.

Yet, Islam is at heart a direct compact between God and the individual believer, with no real role for intercession from a priestly caste or other intermediary. Simply put, there is nothing on a par with the Vatican or its office of pope, ruling on religious questions

and enforcing its views among the faithful. Nor is there an established priesthood spreading this official view.

At the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632 C.E., the Islamic community lost its only direct link with the revelation later assembled in the Qur'an and, with it, the opportunity to seek authoritative clarification of its language and intent. As a result, the believer is expected to read and study the holy text itself on his or her own for guidance, although consultation with experts is common.

This, of course, has not prevented countless claims over the centuries from sultans, caliphs, jurists, *ayatollahs*, and others to have a monopoly on religious truth. A highly organized set of interpretations of religious law arose in the late medieval period, creating the recognized "schools" of Islam followed around the world.

Today's violent religious figures, such as Osama bin Laden, have tried to assert such a monopoly in support of their demands and actions. In Iran, repeated attempts by the supreme clerical leader to claim religious infallibility have generally failed in the face of deep skepticism among other religious figures and the general public.

Media professionals, then, face considerable challenge in identifying sources to address religious questions. Of course, there is a large number of agreed principles of the faith, many of which have already been discussed in earlier chapters. As we have seen, however, in the competing historical and contemporary understandings of *jihad*, even what may appear as fundamental ideas and doctrines give rise to a wide range of interpretations.

One way to address this phenomenon is to avoid, except perhaps in the most clear-cut cases, categorical statements about what is permitted and what is forbidden under Islam. Sentences that begin, “Islam says ...” often lead to dead-ends. Not only do they risk oversimplification or outright error, but they also often obscure other important and newsworthy factors that may be at work.

The “Danish cartoon” crisis of late 2005 and early 2006 provides an instructive example. It began when a Danish newspaper published 12 editorial cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad, one of which depicted him in a bomb-shaped turban. Another presented Muhammad pleading with volunteer suicide bombers, “Stop. Stop. We ran out of virgins” — a reference to the idea, common in Western circles, that suicide attacks are primarily motivated by promises of sexual reward in paradise.

The publication of the cartoons in the Western press led to violent demonstrations, diplomatic protests, and economic boycotts across the Islamic world. At stake in our increasingly interconnected world were a number of central issues: the proper extent of press freedoms; minority rights; the shifting landscape of blasphemy laws and prohibitions; and the history of Muslim grievance toward the West.

Such matters received little attention, with Western media coverage almost exclusively blaming the uproar on Islam’s general prohibition on representations of the human image. Setting aside the many exceptions, such as the Persian miniature tradition or the contemporary practice among the Shi’ites of Iran and the Alevi of Turkey of depicting

their holiest figures, this assertion of an absolute ban diverted attention from the central source of Muslim anger: the presentation of Muhammad as a cold-blooded killer. Similarly, almost no one reported on the role of the Danish media and its supporters as cynical provocateurs motivated by domestic political concerns.

This same caution toward sourcing is particularly important in such emotive cases as suicide bombings, in which the perpetrators and their supporters often claim religious sanction under Islam. Reporters who simply take the most inflammatory quotations from so-called *jihadi* websites or religious militants at face value risk overlooking some of the other possible causes of the violence. These could include ethnic, class, or clan rivalries, economic dislocation, geo-political motives, or personal resistance.

Ironically, both today's *jihadis* and the Western community of terrorism experts generally agree that while a religious impulse lies behind these incidents, each side has its own powerful motivations for staking out such a position. By contrast, reporters and editors must be prepared to dig deeper in search of other possible root causes.

Hot-button Issues: Islam, violence, and women

POPULAR Western views of Islam are generally colored by a series of “hot-button” issues, the presence of which reveal their deep historical roots. These include Muslims’ approach to science, democracy, and other aspects of modernity; to violence; and to the treat-

ment of women. Any regular consumer of contemporary media will recognize just how often Western reporting on Islam is often slotted into one, if not all three, of these categories.

The fears and anxieties produced by the terrorist attacks in 2011, exacerbated by the American public's general lack of engagement with world events and by the demagogic responses of the nation's political class, reinvigorated the historical narrative that Islam represents an existential threat to Western society.

In this environment the idea that the world was caught up in a clash of civilizations easily took root, although that very same notion had originally been ridiculed by scholars and commentators across the political spectrum when it was first laid out in the early 1990s. Once this idea became established in both media and political discourse, there was little chance it would be seriously challenged or critically examined, a process that has yet to begin in earnest.

[A study](#) by the historian Ervand Abrahamian of major U.S. media outlets and their treatment of Islam in the wake of these terrorist attacks found a remarkably unified approach that saw the attacks as the logical outgrowth of Islam, its culture, and civilization. In other words, violence inherent to Islam was to blame to the exclusion of any other possible factors. As a result, the full story surrounding September 11 has been largely ignored.

Reacting to these events, *The New York Times* created a special section, "A Nation Challenged" and promised "complete worldwide coverage of the roots and consequences of September 11." Readers

rightfully expected a range of approaches, ideas, and discussions about such a vital issue. Yet, according to the Abrahamian study, the reporting featured in this special insert was almost exclusively rooted in the “clash of civilizations” theory, in which the worlds of Islam and the West were engaged in evitable conflict. Typical headlines included:

This Is a Religious War

Jihad 101

Barbarians at the Gate

The Force of Islam

Divine Inspiration

Defusing the Holy Bomb

The Core of Muslim Rage

Dreams of Holy War

The Deep Intellectual Roots of Islamic Rage

A Head-on Collision of Alien Cultures

Conversely, this same overreliance on the idea of a clash of civilizations effectively prevented media professionals from examining the rise of violent extremist tendencies in the contemporary Muslim world. If, as the theory dictates, Islam is inherently violent and bent on confrontation with the West, then there is literally no point in asking whether social, economic, theological, or other developments played a role in the phenomenon of terrorism in the name of religious faith. As a result, important forces at work in the Muslim world, factors that

drove both minority religious extremism as well as moderate responses on the part of a majority of Muslims, have gone unreported.

Western media attention in the wake of the attacks on New York and Washington likewise coalesced around the question of Islam and women, fuelled in large part by what can only be termed an obsession with the institution of the veil, or what Muslims refer to as *hijab*, or “modest dress.”

The history of veiling in Islam is long and complex, and the doctrinal evidence on veiling as a religious requirement is not clear cut. Moreover, the attitudes of Muslim women around the world toward veiling as a religious obligation are far from universal, with a considerable number seeing the institution as a matter of personal choice. Yet, by the early 20th century the veil had emerged as a central cultural battleground, with the West demanding it be cast off in the name of modernization and a majority of Muslims — women as well as men — seeking its continued use as a religious obligation, or an assertion of personal identity, or both.

Today, it is a commonplace that the many aspects of veiling — its popularity or lack thereof, its size or color, degree of transparency or coverage — provide Western journalists with useful barometer of Muslim societies. According to this calculus, fewer, smaller, or more revealing veils, or less stringent adherence to earlier norms of *hijab*, indicate movement toward a more modern society, greater political liberty, and improved economic and social conditions.

This approach is problematic for a number of reasons. First, it

presupposes that Muslim women universally view the institution of veiling in the same way as most Westerners, that is, as an atavistic and hated practice forcibly imposed by men. Second, it tends to sexualize the entire array of Muslim beliefs and practices, and even the broader Islamic civilization, and to reduce them to perceptions of the dynamic between men and women.

On a more profound level, it bespeaks a complete misunderstanding of the deep divide in the ways Muslim and Western societies approach human sexuality. Islam has no notion of original sin and instead promotes an active sex life, but only within a rigid social order, in which veiling plays an important part, designed to ensure proper behavior. This is in sharp contrast to Western tradition.

The anthropologist Fadwa el-Guindi explained this important distinction and the misunderstandings that flow from it in her important 1999 book, *[Veil: Modesty, Privacy, and Resistance](#)*:

Both Islam and Christianity provide moral systems to restrain improper and disorderly behavior that threatens the sociomoral order: Christianity chose the path of desexualizing the worldly environment; Islam of regulating the social order while accepting its sexualized environment

In their accounts of travels, scholars and writers with a Euro-Christian background had difficulty comprehending the challenge Islam had taken upon itself in opting for the latter path. The fertile imagination that embellishes accounts of “baths and harems and veils” is woven out of an internalized culture of a desexualized society.

Closely affiliated with Western views of violence and veiling in Islam is the notion that Muslims are ill-suited to democracy, scientific and technological advancement, and other trappings of modern life. Instead, Islam is frozen in time — lacking in history, to quote the Enlightenment thinkers — and generally backward looking. Preeminence in media coverage is given to the notion of a majority of Muslims as “fundamentalists,” yearning for a return to an idealized medieval Golden Age, while more progressive visions, including serious attempts to work out a political system that is both Islamic and demonstrably democratic, get little if any attention.

Theory and practice: what do you do?

THE context of the Islam beat owes its broad outlines to an idea of Islam and the Muslims that was crafted as wartime propaganda in the late 11th century and has, for a variety of reasons, proven remarkably resilient ever since.

What’s more, the resulting assumptions operate in the background, largely unseen and unnoticed. They dictate the language and its associated meanings that we use in daily reportage of Muslim affairs. They shape the way we listen to Muslims. And, ultimately, they hamper attempts by media professionals, scholars, and analysts to understand the world of Islam or to convey it in any meaningful way to the rest of us.

With this in mind, it is worth revisiting the four central building blocks of beat coverage in light of the foregoing discussion.

STORY SELECTION. This is, of course, the starting point for any beat assignment and naturally shapes all other elements. We have seen above that three general themes run through much of Western attention to Islam, including media coverage. These “hot-button” issues involve questions of Islam and modernity; Islam and violence; and Islam and women.

All provide legitimate subjects for news reports and investigation, but today’s media professionals must be aware of the potential threats to their understanding and objectivity contained in the ways these are approached. Each strand identifies a specific phenomenon (modernity, violence, women) and then views it through the variable of Islam. That is, the object of inquiry itself is seen exclusively as an expression of religious faith or practice while other aspects or explanations are lacking.

By way of a recent example, much of the coverage of the so-called Arab Spring was driven by the fact that grassroots demands for democratic institutions and the rejection of autocracy, at enormous personal risk, took most mainstream media commentators and reporters, as well as the Washington establishment, by surprise.

SOURCING. Who speaks for Islam? This is a thorny question and makes the identification and proper use of sources on religious matters particularly difficult. Reporters have little choice but to edu-

cate themselves in the basic tenets and practices of the Muslim faith, in order to avoid falling prey to the sexiest soundbite. Consultation with a wide range of religious figures, something that is often not easy to achieve, is also essential. Finally, Muslims must be allowed to speak in their own voices, without the intermediation of Western experts.

OMISSION AND COMMISSION. This is closely related to sourcing and the above caveats apply. Among the most insidious powers of the established Western idea of Islam is its ability to effectively screen out areas of inquiry or investigation. Here again, the Arab Spring comes to mind.

It is worth asking why popular demands for democracy in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Bahrain, and elsewhere were viewed with surprise? Surely the answer lies in the notion that Muslims, unlike other peoples, are uninterested in such freedoms and ill-suited to realizing them.

In other words, the failure to predict the Arab Spring was in large part a failure of the journalism establishment, which had never asked the right questions or gone to the right places.

One noteworthy exception, *No God but God: Egypt and the Triumph of Islam* (Oxford University Press, 2000) by Geneive Abdo,¹ not only predicted these events more than a decade in advance, but even identified many of the central figures who would later lead the new movement. At the time, her book was dismissed by many as naïve.

¹ Full disclosure: the author was previously married to Ms. Abdo.

PRESENTATION. All the hard work and careful crafting of news reports from the Islam beat can be easily undone by careless presentation. Journalists, editors, producers must be especially vigilant over the language they apply and the imagery they employ, particularly in the adoption of terms whose “common law” understanding in the West has diverged considerably from its actual meaning.

Headlines, graphics, and photographs — all essentially shorthand means of communicating valuable information — are particularly vulnerable to abuse. A common but by no means trivial example would include the familiar photograph or video footage of a young Muslim man praying next to an AK-47 to illustrate a general piece on contemporary Muslim life or political activism. Such an image ignores the vast majority of Muslims who are pursuing the goal of a more religious society through peaceful means and only reinforces the underlying Western assumption that Islam itself is inherently violent.

Despite intense focus on the subject since the terrorist attacks of 2001, little progress has been made in the depth or sophistication of Western media coverage of Islam, or in the general public’s understanding of the Muslim world. A recent culture clash between the West and the world of Islam was sparked by a video clip that drew on Crusades-era propaganda to slander the Prophet Muhammad, demonstrating again that it is more important than ever to address the limitations and challenges facing the profession.



understanding the local community you are writing about and the new arrivals.

You quickly discover online one or two experts with apparent knowledge about the group. But they seem either too glib or cannot answer all of your questions. Plus you are at a loss about where you need to focus your reporting.

You have company. In the last few decades, many journalists have faced the challenge of dealing with stories where the most important details are somewhere in the Muslim world, but they are doing their reporting here. At first glance, your chances of doing complete and responsible reporting may seem limited. Don't despair.

The fact is, this kind of reporting is quite possible. But it calls for some research and learning. However, the payoff is worth the effort in terms of providing balanced, accurate and analytical reporting. The price for doing your utmost is providing the kind of journalism that will not only enlighten but will also do no unnecessary harm.

Let's step back for minute, here.

Unfortunately, for the last few decades, a lot of foreign reporting has focused on the most negative aspects of the Muslim world — terrorism and extremism — leaving out all else that should be told about the world's 1.5 billion Muslims, who are strongly linked to the Muslims in North America.

We'll talk in a bit about these broader stories that open the world of Islam to your audiences. But meanwhile let's look at ways you can

provide top-notch crisis reporting as well as the broader journalism without leaving home — in most cases.

1. Set out your reporting strategy as soon as possible so you can cover all bases as soon and as completely as possible. Because the reporting on Islam-related issues in recent years has been marred by incomplete details or incorrect “facts,” you need to tread with extra caution.
2. Develop a list of sources and contacts in the local Muslim community. Make sure you understand the community’s diversity in terms of where they come from and their beliefs so that you can provide a range of views if they exist. You want the person-in-the-street point of view, an insight from someone from the community. But you don’t want to rely on that to frame your reporting. Why? Often it is the easiest part of your reporting, a random interview. But you need to understand the larger picture before you frame your reporting, especially if you are first learning about this community.
3. Don’t stop at collecting sources and contacts. As events unfold, the reality sometimes changes and you are likely to need to return to your sources to help your reporting. So, too, the sudden arrival of news hungry journalists can be disquieting to a community already

somewhat dubious about the news media's intentions. That is why it is important to let your sources know you are available to them and that you are likely to contact them in the future. Developing trust is critical to developing a broader understanding.

4. Identify experts. This is not always so easy. You need to make sure the analysis you are getting is without bias and not everyone concedes their bias up front. Various academic and journalism groups offer guides to scholars and experts, and that is a good way to begin your search. Some reliable sources in North America include the Middle East Association and Religion News Reporters (for other suggestions, see the resources section at the end of this book).
5. Should you ignore experts who clearly have a bias or a stake in the story you are reporting on? I wouldn't. You want to hear from everyone. But you definitely do not want to pass along views that are stereotyping, or inflammatory or incomplete. And you absolutely don't want to provide quotes from only one side of the story.
6. Don't limit your search for sources to North America. Experts here can help you locate contacts in the Muslim world, which may have more in-depth or fresher insights. Similarly, seek out fellow journalists overseas

whose own reporting may enhance your understanding. Your search for global sources can include bloggers or websites that may help you understand an issue or point you in the direction of other sources.

Giving global perspective to your reporting

IN most cases, what you are likely missing from your local reporting is the global context.

- Who are these people?
- Where have they come from and how do they fit into the global Muslim map?

[In a talk about covering Muslims](#), Phillip Bennett, the then-managing editor of *The Washington Post*, told of a gap that he discovered when looking at news coverage of a small Muslim group embroiled in a controversy about building a center in suburban Maryland.

He explained:

This was big local news. It attracted coverage from Canada and in the *International Herald Tribune*, and *The Post* wrote two straightforward news stories in the Metro section. But mostly it was a story of the local papers, *The Gazette* and the *Frederick News-Post*. All told more than 150 stories, letters and columns were published about the unfolding drama.

At first, the clash of civilizations narrative played

well. Newspaper stories described Walkersville as an isolated hamlet, where the mayor ran the feed store and hosted a weekly dominoes game. Townsfolk protested that they were not intolerant, just conservative, though many stories conveyed a veiled accusation of redneckism.

The Ahmadiyyah were portrayed with general sympathy, but shallowly. Not a single story went into depth about the group, [which,] since its founding a century ago in Pakistan, has a history of persecution within Islam as a heretical sect. Who were they? What did they believe? Why did they choose Walkersville? It was noted without irony that one spokesman for the group, a 60-year-old pharmacist named Intisar Abassi, lives next door in Frederick, where he works on bio warfare vaccines at the Army's Fort Detrick.

What's the context?

THE simple solution to the problem that Bennett talked about was for someone to pin down as many details as possible about the organization. Who are the Ahmadiyyah? A search for sources here and in Pakistan would have revealed the story about this group, which has had a long presence in the U.S.

It is the extra detail that enriches the reporting and shows an effort to go beyond the surface.

When the controversy erupted over a Muslim community center in New York City near the remains of the World Trade Center, it took jour-

nalists a while before they dug into the situation. They discovered that one of the leaders of the Muslim effort follows the Sufi tradition. The detail added to the complexity of the story. As the news coverage heated up, *The New York Times* ran this column by a British author familiar with Sufism. Without the passion of the column, a similar explanation from an expert could have been used in a news report (see Chapter 6: Islam in America). Here's an excerpt from the column by [William Dalrymple](#):

Feisal Abdul Rauf of the Cordoba Initiative is one of America's leading thinkers of Sufism, the mystical form of Islam, which in terms of goals and outlook couldn't be farther from the violent Wahabism of the jihadists. His videos and sermons preach love, the remembrance of God (or *zikr*) and reconciliation. His slightly New Agey rhetoric makes him sound, for better or worse, like a Muslim Deepak Chopra. But in the eyes of Osama bin Laden and the Taliban, he is an infidel-loving, grave-worshipping apostate; they no doubt regard him as a legitimate target for assassination.

For such moderate, pluralistic Sufi imams are the front line against the most violent forms of Islam. In the most radical parts of the Muslim world, Sufi leaders risk their lives for their tolerant beliefs, every bit as bravely as American troops on the ground in Baghdad and Kabul do. Sufism is the most pluralistic incarnation of Islam — accessible to the learned and the ignorant, the faithful and nonbelievers — and is thus a uniquely valuable bridge between East and West.

Andrea Elliot won a Pulitzer Prize for her reporting in *The New York Times* in 2007 on the everyday reality of the life of an imam in Brooklyn. (She is one of the reporter contributors to this volume.) The success of her reporting was the ability to humanize someone struggling with everyday challenges faced by many others. Not too long ago she provided [a long profile](#) in *The New York Times Magazine* about a more widely known and controversial imam in the U.S. who belongs to the Salafi movement. Well after introducing us to him, she tells us what Salafism is and relies on an expert to put them into context. She writes:

While versions of Salafiya have persisted through history, its current iteration derives largely from the puritanical, 18th-century school of Saudi Islam known as Wahabism. Today's Salafis share the same basic theology but differ on how to manifest it. Many are apolitical, while another subset engages in politics as a nonviolent means to an end — namely, an Islamic theocracy. A third fringe group is devoted to militant jihad as the only path to Islamic rule and, ultimately, heaven. All three strains have surfaced in the West, where the movement has flourished among the children of immigrants. “It’s about this deep desire for certainty,” Bernard Haykel, a leading Salafi expert at Princeton University, says. “They are responding to a kind of disenchantment with the modern world.”

To report on the mental health needs of recently arrived Iraqi refugees, Ashlee Rezin, a journalism graduate student at Columbia College, Chicago, wanted to understand the issues that they faced be-

fore leaving for the U.S. She was able to reach an expert in Iraq and talk with her via Skype, an Internet link that allows video and audio communications. [Here she quotes the expert:](#)

Dr. Edith Szanto, who teaches at the American University of Iraq, Sulaimani, is also a volunteer with First-Stage, a program that teaches reading and writing to Arab children in the Qalawa refugee camp in Iraq's autonomous region of Sulaimani.

She said refugees in Iraq are most often viewed as gypsies, and a sense of hopelessness often leads children to begging and prostitution.

“Iraqis’ and Iraqi refugees’ problems, such as depression and paranoia are deep-seated social problems,” she said. “If a poor mental state is not the result of the Iraq war, it’s from the 10 years of UN sanctions before that, and then before that there were the 10 years of the Iranian-Iraq war; these people have not seen normal lives for decades.”

Double-checking your experts

BUT let's be extra careful, as we mentioned earlier, about where we find our context and how we peg our stories. Not too long ago there was controversy in central Tennessee about a Muslim group's desire to build a mosque and strong local resistance.

The local opponents to the mosque called upon experts to make their case and, as a reporter for *The Tennessean* pointed out, the experts

clearly had strong points of view. The headline of one article read, “Anti-Muslim Crusaders Make Millions Spreading Fear.”

Similarly, here is a story from the *Anchorage Daily News* that supplies some background on experts, called upon to talk about Islam, who have supported laws barring *sharia*, or Islamic law, from taking effect in the U.S. The story was provoked by controversy over a proposed Alaska law on the topic, one of over a dozen introduced in recent years in the U.S. [The article reported](#) that:

The Council on American-Islamic Relations called on (State Rep.) Gatto to drop his invitation for Stop Islamization of America Executive Director Pamela Geller to testify at a Wednesday hearing on his bill, saying she leads a hate group.

Gatto shrugged off the request. “Anybody can make a statement that if they are opposed to your point of view they’re a hate group,” he said.

A *New York Times* profile of Geller that ran last fall described the growing influence of her website, Atlas Shrugs, and her posting of doctored photos of Supreme Court Justice Elena Kagan in a Nazi helmet and suggestion that the State Department was run by “Islamic Supremacists.”

Geller testified Wednesday by telephone to the Alaska House Judiciary Committee, which Gatto chairs.

“How can anyone oppose a law that seeks to prevent foreign laws from undermining fundamental Constitutional liberties?” Geller said.

Geller maintained “surveys in the Muslim world” show most Muslims want a unified caliphate with a “strict al-Qaida-

like *Sharia*.” She spoke of Muslim polygamy, jihad in support of *Sharia*, and said Muslims have demanded special accommodation in U.S. schools, workplaces and government.

Anchorage Democratic Rep. Lindsey Holmes objected.

“I’m getting very uncomfortable with what I see is some fairly negative testimony against a large segment of society. I think we’re getting off into some pretty dangerous, divisive territory,” Holmes said.

Geller responded that “I don’t think I did anything offensive, I merely stated the facts.”

If you are relying on an expert outside the U.S., you need to do the same vetting. If they are offering information or insights not available from anyone else, is there a reason for this? How can they help you confirm the information or explanation that they are offering?

Painting a compelling story without stereotypes and exoticism

SOME of the allure of foreign reporting is discovering a community and a way of life that you do not know much about and which intrigues you. The same allure exists for our readers. They are drawn by the stories we tell about communities they know little about and which fascinate them.

You might find yourself in the same situation if you are reporting on a Muslim community that is largely made up of immigrants,

a community which lives in an enclave and ambience reminiscent of life in the home country. But there's a difference between telling a story about community far away and a community at home. The danger is that you might provide an exotic scenario that does not get beyond the images to tell us about the lives lived in your community.

But your story does little to tell us about the people. It emphasizes mostly their differences and, to some eyes, why they are foreign and will remain foreign. You have to create a delicate balance here. On one hand you want to give us a sense of the community, but you also need to get beyond the cultural and social nuances to let us understand the souls and minds of these people.

Here is part of [a story from the Buffalo News](#) that was written after the arrest of several Yemenis on terrorism-related charges in September 2002:

In the aftermath of the recent arrest of six men in Lackawanna's Yemeni neighborhood, all accused of being trained by the al-Qaida terrorist group, this community closed ranks around its native sons, denying they are terrorists-in-training and declaring them as American as you or your neighbor: People who work. Go to school. Take care of their families. Play soccer.

But while the accused men are native-born Americans, their community is not Norman Rockwell's America. It is not even Buffalo's Polish East Side or Irish South Buffalo.

This is a piece of ethnic America where the Arabic-speaking Al Jazeera television station is beamed in from

Qatar through satellite dishes to Yemenite-American homes; where young children answer “Salaam” when the cell phone rings, while older children travel to the Middle East to meet their future husband or wife; where soccer moms don’t seem to exist, and where girls don’t get to play soccer — or, as some would say, football.

In some ways, this slice of American life has the feel of Cattaraugus County’s Amish community, where men and women dress in traditional clothes and commute by horse and buggy. Or to the Crown Heights section in Brooklyn, where Hasidic men in yarmulkes and women in long dresses don’t drive on the Sabbath. They may be American, but they keep much of their traditional ways.

There’s one big difference, though. This is the community that helped raise the six arrested men — and two other men still at large — who the FBI claims formed an al-Qaida “sleeper cell,” waiting perhaps for orders from Osama bin Laden and others who directed the Sept. 11 attacks on the United States.

To many Yemenite-Americans — shocked by events unfolding in federal court in recent days, yet increasingly convinced that the government’s case is largely the result of overzealousness — this ethnic neighborhood has provided the support first-generation immigrants of all kinds traditionally seek when coming to America.

It’s also a community under pressure, as an outside world sometimes looks askance, skeptical of what seems like a community caught in another time, another place.

Considering the point we were talking about a minute ago, do you think these graphs help make the community seem more distant and possibly unwelcome? Or is it impossible to avoid mixing your reporting with descriptions of cultural differences?

Learning on deadline and after

HERE again is Andrea Elliott, who writes in [this article](#) for the *Neiman Reports* about how she went about reporting on an imam in Brooklyn for the *New York Times* and what she learned in the process.

When I set out to write about Muslims in America earlier that year, I, too, found myself in unfamiliar territory. Few news organizations had reported deeply on the “Muslim community,” a phrase I learned to avoid. It was, in fact, a constellation of communities, complicated, diverse and exceedingly difficult for non-Muslims to penetrate.

The terrorist attacks of 9/11 changed life dramatically for Muslims in the United States. Their businesses, homes and mosques came under surveillance by the authorities, and their status in American society became uncertain. Researchers at Columbia University who studied the impact of 9/11 on American Muslims found two striking patterns: Many Muslims took refuge in their faith, growing more devout.

Others distanced themselves from Islam, avoiding their mosques and even changing their names. Men named Mohammed became “Moe;” Osama became “Sam.” Some women

stopped veiling, while others began covering themselves for the first time.

As I began my reporting, I found that many Muslims had retreated into their private lives. In the New York area, I could find few who would talk with me. Again and again I heard the same complaints: that Muslims had suffered needlessly in America, and the press was to blame; that reporters had distorted Islam by exploring it only through the prism of terrorism.

As a non-Muslim American who did not speak Arabic, I came to this story with few natural advantages. I learned by trial and error. Early on, for example, I noticed my temptation to describe Muslim women by their headscarves, as Western reporters so often do. But with time, I began wondering what it would be like for non-Muslim women to always be described by, say, their hair. So I tried to unearth more revealing observations.

The other reporting on the Muslim world

LOST in the crush of the news and stories about Muslims in crisis are the stories that tell us about the lives of millions of Muslims. These are the stories about art, culture, food, music, and society as found in the vast global footprint of Islam. If, by chance, you have the opportunity to do this kind of reporting, think again about how you can bring a global angle home to your reporting. How can you bring in scholars or experts or information from over there to make your reporting here more compelling, more interesting, and something to remember?

Let me offer some examples.

Here is a *New York Times* story about the creation of an Islamic-themed courtyard at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. It's [an art story](#) that focuses on the Moroccan workers brought to New York for the effort, but it is something else. Besides talking about the meaning of the work and experts who took part in the effort, the story offers this key graph:

With world attention focused on the Middle East, the courtyard has taken on an unforeseen importance for the museum; for the Kingdom of Morocco itself, which has followed the project closely; and for a constituency of Muslim scholars and supporters of the Met. They hope it will function not only as a placid chronological way station for people moving through more than a millennium of Islamic history, but also as a symbol, amid potent anti-Islamic sentiment in the United States and Europe, that aesthetic and intellectual commerce remains alive between Islam and the West.

“Every one of these guys here knows what this means, what’s riding on this,” said Mr. Naji, 35, the president and chief executive of Arabesque, a company of craftsmen founded in Fez in 1928 by his great-grandfather, now run by Mr. Naji and three of his brothers.”

Ironically, on the same day, in same section of *The New York Times*, was another [article by a movie critic](#). It began by raising questions about the inward look of U.S. cinema but it quickly segued into asking:

...when Arab and Muslim characters do appear on screen, why are they presented in such simplistic and stereotyped ways?

Several graphs later, the article lets an expert offer an explanation for what takes place in the U.S. in the movie industry.

“I’m not sure the industry sees a lot of box-office potential in getting these representations right and portraying Muslims or the Islamic religion in a more nuanced and realistic way,” Mr. Bernstein said. “It’s easier to simply represent everyone as fanatical and a threat to America, and easier still not even to go near it, because then you upset a lot fewer people.”

“We see everything through American eyes, without context or a representation of community” on the Islamic side, said Matthew Bernstein, an editor of the book “Visions of the East: Orientalism in Film” and chairman of the film and media studies department at Emory University in Atlanta.

So we have two examples of journalism on cultural issues very much involved in the Muslim world. But the discussion takes place here and not there. If you have the opportunity to report on this kind of a topic, think of ways that you can reach out to artists, experts, critics from across the Muslim world who can offer insights you might not consider. If you are working in multi-media, you have an even greater potential to enhance your project by conveying an audio or video message. How do you find these contacts? Again you can rely on experts here to connect you with experts there.

Why don't you take a trip there?

SAY you are a journalist in Portland, Oregon, or Minneapolis or Tampa and you see a great possibility for traveling to a place in the Muslim world to tell a story that will resonate back home. But you are not a foreign correspondent. And your outlet doesn't have the funds for such an adventure. Of, if you are working on your own, you simply can't afford such a trip.

The sudden collapse of foreign reporting among U.S. news organizations has opened new doors that you should consider. Several organizations have stepped into the breach, offering story-based support for journalists who want to cover uncovered foreign stories. The Pulitzer Center for Crisis Reporting is one. The International Reporting Project is another.

How do you get there?

THINK through not one but several stories that are connected and that you think you can complete within a reasonable amount of time. Check out what has already been done in English and then find help or rely upon an Internet translation tool to search for reporting in other languages on the issues you want to cover. Thanks to the Internet, it is easy to connect with organizations, journalists and experts; I would strongly recommend touching base with as many people as possible to see if your ideas fly. If they do, rely on these people for your contacts and sources once you get there.

But there's much more to taking the leap into global journalism

and you can get very good advice from some of the online courses offered by the Poynter Institute's [News University](#).

If you are headed to a place where there might be some danger, there are a number of guides worth reading. I would begin with the one produced by the [Committee to Protect Journalists](#) and then look at what the [Dart Center](#) has developed.

Why do these stories matter more today?

MORE than ever the U.S. has become enmeshed with the Muslim world because of wars, crises, immigration, a global economy and the shrinking global boundaries.

This means journalists in Lansing, Michigan, and Las Vegas have become hooked into a network of stories that reach far beyond their old boundaries.

What are these stories?

LET'S look back at one relevant event. In the aftermath of 9/11, many Arab and Muslim men were swept up by federal officials. A review of the process by the U.S. Justice Department's Office of the Inspector General later raised questions about the handling of a number of men who were brought to New York City facilities, for example. Many were deported within a short time, making it impossible to reach them directly. But it would have been possible to contact some through their lawyers. An

ambitious story would have been to track someone from where they lived in the U.S. to where they had landed. That is still possible.

Some news organizations did manage to tackle the story, though it was a hard situation to unravel in a difficult time. Here is [a story from the *Baltimore Sun*](#), which captures the news and the issues surrounding it, balancing the concerns of the Muslim community along with the concerns of government security officials.

It shows the challenge to investigators as they patrol for al-Qaeda cells among millions of immigrants, for whom language and cultural barriers, evasive answers, aliases, and fake documents are commonplace.

For agents who ordinarily hunt for perpetrators of crimes already committed, the new and unfamiliar task is to figure out who might be plotting an attack.

FBI agents, criticized for “failing to connect the dots” before the Sept. 11 attacks, now err on the side of caution, pursuing even the slightest hint of terrorist ties. FBI Director Robert S. Mueller III has declared prevention of attacks to be the bureau’s top priority.

But the case also reveals the anguish of Muslim immigrants who feel their lives shadowed by suspicion. Their fears are confirmed when they see other immigrants held up publicly as potential mass murderers, jailed for months — and then released or deported with no official acknowledgment that they are innocent of terrorism.

‘Very frustrating’

IT’S very frustrating for the Muslim community,” says Abid Husain, director of the Islamic Center of Baltimore. “There’s a fear that anybody can be picked up at any time.”

The fear taints aspects of American life that drew the immigrants here in the first place.

“The best part of this country was everybody was innocent until proven guilty,” says Dr. Hasan Jalisi, a physician and president of Muslim Community Support Services, a Baltimore-based advocacy group formed last year. “But for Muslims that no longer seems to be the case.”

“At the root of the tensions is the fact that the Sept. 11 hijackers lived for months in the United States undetected by law enforcement before launching their murderous plot.”

As a result of the intense military involvement of the U.S. in the fate of Iraq and Afghanistan, and the nation’s increased interaction with the Muslim world, stories about Islam have a local resonance. As a result of globalization and changed immigration patterns, a growing number of Muslims have come to the U.S. as workers or refugees, or been reunited with their relatives who are citizens. They join the already large number of African-Americans who still are the majority of Muslims in the U.S.

And so, as the Muslim population grows in the U.S., the problems with stories of communities like the one we cited before — the

Ahmadiyyah — will hopefully grow less infrequent. This is the kind of journalism that you can do here, but at the same time, stretch yourself to bring in what you need for your story from over there.

How would you report this? An exercise

BELOW is an item that appeared on CNN's website soon after the attack in Pakistan and killing of Osama Bin Laden. Your editor has passed it along to you and asked you to do a more local version.

How are you going to do this? What are key parts of your reporting strategy? From the list below, which approach would you choose?

- a) Visit the largest community of Muslims and conduct interviews with the people you meet there.
- b) Identify Muslim community groups and their spokespersons.
- c) Consult your sources guide to find leading scholars on Islam.
- d) After interviewing a number of people and finding one good person to give a human face to the story, lede with him/her and then step back to explain how the community overall views the issue.
- e) All of the above.

By Eric Marrapodi, CNN Belief Blog Co-Editor

(CNN) — Osama bin Laden wore the mantle of a religious leader. He looked the part and talked a good game, but his theology was a radical departure from traditional orthodox Islam.

The pitch to join al-Qaeda did not start with an invitation to put on a suicide vest, but like other religious splinter groups and cults, took advantage of disenfranchisement and poverty.

Bin Laden had no official religious training but developed his own theology of Islam.

“We don’t know that (bin Laden) was ever exposed to orthodox Islamic teachings,” said Ebrahim Moosa, a professor of religion and Islamic studies at Duke University.

The writing of ideologues in the Muslim Brotherhood influenced bin Laden heavily, Moosa said.

“He takes scriptural imperatives at their face value and believes this is the only instruction and command God has given him — unmediated by history, unmediated by understanding, unmediated by human experience. Now that’s a difference between Muslim orthodoxy and what I would call uber- or hyperscripturalists,” Moosa said.

The vast majority of Islamic scholars and imams say the teaching of the Prophet Mohammed happened in historical context that needs to be understood when reading and interpreting the Quran.

“If the likes of bin Laden, if they had spent one day or maybe one month possibly, in a madrasa (Muslim religious

school) and understood how the canonical tradition is interpreted, they would not go onto this kind of destructive path they go on,” Moosa said.

In the entire leadership structure of al-Qaeda, “no one has had any sort of formal religious training from any seminary,” said Aftab Malik, a global expert on Muslim affairs at the United Nations Alliance of Civilization. He is researching a Ph.D. on al-Qaeda.

“What you had was an engineer and a doctor leading a global jihad against the whole world,” Malik said. “That would never happen in normative Islam. It’s just such an aberration.”

John Esposito, a professor of religion and international affairs at Georgetown University’s School of Foreign Service, said bin Laden “appropriates Islam ... to legitimate and mobilize people.”

“If you look at bin Laden’s early statements and arguments, his interview with Peter Bergen on CNN ... lots of people would see it as something that would go down very well not just with many Muslims but among many analysts when he talks about longstanding political grievances,” Esposito said.

“What bin Laden ends up doing is saying anyone who disagrees with him, any Muslim, is in fact an apostate,” he said. That includes Muslims who would not join his fight, he said. “It’s a distortion of the traditional teaching, and it just extends the parameters and the consequences in order to legitimate how when you’re fighting on the ground you’re fighting against your own people.”

Malik said, “The key issue is of apostasy,” referring to

when a person leaves a faith. “One of the things Osama bin Laden deviates from is calling those people who do not implement Sharia, or God’s law, on the planet as apostates. If they did not implement Sharia, they deserved death. This is a major departure from normative Islam.”

“The second major deviation is the targeting of non-combatants. Even when you read in the Quran there are injunctions for fighting. But before and after the injunctions for fighting are calls for restraint. ‘Do not attack monks, do not attack women, do not attack children.’ And these are numerated heavily in the Hadith, which are uncontested,” Malik said, referring to the sayings of the prophet and his close companions.

“What bin Laden has done is ignored those injunctions,” he said. “The reason he has ignored them, in Osama bin Laden’s theology it’s basically a theology of anarchy.”

“Once you let the genie out of the bottle you can’t put it back in, and that’s the big difference between al-Qaeda theology and normative Islam. Normative Islam has heavy constraints — very, very heavy.”

Bin Laden’s theology is waning greatly in influence, Esposito said, in part because of the rise of the Arab Spring, the revolts of people on the street across the Middle East that have overthrown regimes in Tunisia and Egypt.

“(Al-Qaeda’s) whole notion was to develop a mass movement,” Esposito said. “Well, they never did.”



Women and Islam

By Shereen el Feki



“Frankly, given the choices a woman has in Islam, homicide bomber might very well be the most attractive choice. Clitorectomies, honor killing, forced marriage, 97-year-old husbands or homicide bomber ... decisions, decisions.”

— Pamela Geller’s “Atlas Shrugs” web page

Understanding the diversity of Muslim women

YOU don’t have to dig very deep in 21st-century America to hit a well of anti-Islamic anxiety. Such troubled waters often contain high levels of moral outrage at the perceived subjugation of women in Islam. It’s not just the blogosphere and sites such as the American-based Atlas Shrugs, which blisters with comments like the one above, but mainstream media outlets as well.

Case-in-point is a [2010 Fox News segment](#) in which Bill O’Reilly interviews conservative talk show host Laura Ingraham on whether women in America should be allowed to wear the veil. In this segment, prejudice masquerades as analysis. In just over three minutes, the exchange manages to mock the French, denigrate “Europeans” and pity

Muslim women who choose to cover their faces. It is presented as an indisputable fact that such covering is “a statement of subjugation,” and the female commentator’s bias is projected onto the women who wear it (“You could only see the slit of their eyes, who were, you know, huddled at the back and looked, I’m sorry, very uncomfortable,” she says of women she shared an elevator with in Europe, but how could she tell, given her other complaint that you can see so little of these women’s faces?). The fact that opinion polls show some women want to wear *niqab* is dismissed out of hand: “Are we really trusting the polling of Muslim women who are dominated by men?” But no attempt is made to present the voice of Muslim women. Instead the commentator offers such glib remarks as “They’re like chattels,” “They’re brainwashed.” Which leaves one to wonder, who’s subjugating whom here?

As a Muslim, a woman, and a writer who grew up in North America and now works in the Arab world, I have a keen interest in how Western media covers issues relating to Islam in general and Muslim women in particular. At its worst, such coverage is uninformed and biased, takes the extreme as the norm, and fails to present a diversity of opinion or action. Slightly less dispiriting, though equally disturbing, is the “plucky little Muslim” school of reporting, which portrays any articulate, assertive, and empowered Muslim woman as a rare bird whose very existence is a marvel.

Take, for example, Nicolas Kristof’s [**“What a woman! And what a Muslim!”**](#) piece for *The New York Times* on a Somali female doctor at the forefront of helping her people. Though largely well-intentioned,

such coverage only reinforces the stereotype of active Muslim women as the exception to an otherwise oppressed majority. At its best, however, the American news media manages to present Muslim women, in the United States and abroad, in their full diversity, accurately reflecting their views and actions, no matter how different these may be to mainstream American notions of women's empowerment.

This chapter is intended to help U.S. journalists reach that optimum. (Indeed, as in all of the reporting we do, we search for the context of what we report and a way to connect this reality to our audience. And so, one high priority for your reporting might be to humanize the world of Muslim women. Ask yourself: are you focusing on an extreme example because that image is more compelling? Are you putting these women's lives into context so that you have captured the norm, the major trends, the achievements, as well as the struggles that typify the world of Muslim women?)

Reporting on Islam isn't easy, even for those of us brought up in the faith. To begin with, it is vast and diverse: in countries of immigration, like America, Muslims come from far-flung corners of the traditional Islamic world. Yes, we share a common faith, but how our beliefs are translated into everyday life is strongly influenced by our particular cultural backgrounds, and that can differ greatly for a Muslim of Egyptian extraction like myself and a fellow believer from, say, Pakistan. Then there is a question of authority: while Shia Muslims recognize a supreme spiritual guide who sets the line on issues both spiritual and temporal, Sunni Islam is not characterized by such central leader-

ship, and so a vast range of religious opinion, from ultra-conservative to highly progressive, circulates on any given topic, all the more widely now thanks to satellite TV, the Internet and mobile phones.

Keep in mind, the Qur'an provides clear-cut evidence that women are on an equal footing with men in the sight of God. The Qur'an states: "Their Lord has answered them: 'I will not allow the deeds of any one of you to be lost, whether you are male or female, each is like the other [in rewards]'" (Qur'an 3:195, see also 4:124).

Who are Muslim women in America?

HERE are some research snapshots from a [2009 Gallup survey](#):

- Muslim women are at least as likely as Muslim men to hold a college or postgraduate degree. Muslims have a greater level of economic gender parity than any other group studied.
- Muslim American women are roughly equal to Muslim men in frequency of mosque attendance, in sharp contrast to women in many majority Muslim countries who are generally less likely than men to report attending a religious service in the last week.
- Muslim women are more likely than Muslim men to report having relatives or friends.

Building a balanced story

LEARNING about Islam can take a lifetime — the ultimate deadline. This chapter is designed for journalists on a tighter schedule, who need to make sense of news about Muslim women in their own towns, states, or nationwide, and in short order. In the section below, we'll take three live issues relating to women and Islam and look at the basic building blocks of a balanced and accurate story, with suggestions on where to find the information you need and how to put it all together.

Scenario 1: Discrimination. A Muslim woman working at a local theme park is told by her employers to remove her headscarf, stay out of visitors' sight, or go home. The company enforces a strict dress code as part of its corporate image, and has offered her alternative head coverings. The employee in question insists her head-scarf is integral to her Muslim identity, and is suing the company for religious discrimination.

How Muslim women dress and, in particular, how they cover their heads, has been a long-established flashpoint between the Islamic world and the West. Since the late 1970s, however, and a wave of Islamic conservatism, the temperature around this issue has been rising in tandem with a change in women's public attire from either traditional dress or conventional Western fashion to an array of new styles that cover the head, limbs and, in some cases, face.

Conflicts over Muslim's women's dress — and in particular, their headgear — invoke a variety of legal issues in the U.S., from civil rights to national security. Such considerations are beyond the scope of this section; instead, we're going to focus on the pillars of a solid story, from an Islamic perspective.

Tips

- **Get your terms straight.** Although reporting is improving, too often news stories still refer to “veiled women” as if there were a standard-issue uniform for the entire female *ummah*, the community of believers. There is, however, a bewildering array of ways Muslim women can cover their heads, and faces: the two most common in Western Muslim communities are *hijab* (a basic head scarf) and *niqab* (a garment which covers the lower two-thirds of the face, to the eyes).
- **Understand what you are seeing.** The BBC offers a handy [beginner's guide to Muslim headgear](#) with illustrations, though it's important to keep in mind that there are many more variants and styles than this. If you're not sure what the dress in question is called, include it as a question in your interview with the woman at the center of the story, or call your local Islamic center. In my experience, as a woman and a Muslim, politely phrased questions about Islamic fashion never go amiss.

- **There are no universal rules.** How Muslim women should dress is, like many personal matters in Islam, open to interpretation. The Qur'an, a cornerstone of Islam, exhorts both male and female believers to “lower their glance and guard their private parts” — meaning dress modestly. Moreover, women are exhorted to “not display their charms beyond what [it is acceptable] to reveal; they should let their headscarves fall to cover their necklines and not reveal their charms,” except to a permitted circle of family and acquaintances (Qur'an 24:30–31). One of the key considerations here is avoiding *fitna* — that is, chaos — which might arise from sexual temptation outside of the religiously sanctioned context of marriage. The Qur'an also exhorted the Prophet's wives and female co-religionists “to make their outer garments hang low over them so as to be recognized and not insulted” (Qur'an 33:59) and instructed male believers, “When you ask his [the Prophet's] wives for something, do so from behind a curtain: this is purer both for your hearts and theirs” (Qur'an 33:53). The Arabic for curtain is *hijab*, the term used today for headscarf. But nowhere in the Qur'an are women explicitly told to cover their heads or faces. That is an interpretation which grew in Islam over the centuries, and is a lively point of debate today.
- **Look beyond your border.** What Muslim women wear is a hot topic around the world. You may wish to expand

your readers' scope by considering how other communities and countries are dealing with this issue. Some have banned, or have legislation under consideration to ban the *niqab* or *hijab* in schools or government buildings — these include not just Western countries, most notably France, but also those firmly in the Islamic world, such as Syria and Turkey.

- **Understand the rationale.** In some countries, authorities demand that women cover up in public — most famously in Iran, but also recently in parts of Indonesia. Exploring the arguments for and against such developments in other parts of the world will help refine your own understanding of the issue, and enrich your coverage.
- **Check your assumptions at the door.** There is a tendency in some American media outlets to conclude that women who adopt Islamic dress, particularly the *niqab*, do so under duress — as the Fox News segment described at the beginning of this chapter clearly illustrates. But there are as many reasons why Muslim women choose to cover their heads — religious conviction, protest, fashion, convenience, pressure, among them — as there are women who do so in the first place. Don't let political correctness stop you from asking hard questions about their decisions; don't let preconceived notions stop you from hearing their answer.

Scenario 2: Muslim women leaders. A Muslim woman runs for mayor of a small U.S. town. She is popular with the electorate, because of her many years as a local family doctor and her work in municipal politics on women and children's welfare. However, her candidacy is marked by protest by Muslims who are outraged at the idea of a Muslim woman running for such a position, which they say contravenes the basic tenets of Islam.

Tips

- **In the Qur'an, men and women are equal before God,** and the revelation is directed to believers of both sexes: "For men and women who are devoted to God — believing men and women, truthful men and women, steadfast men and women, humble men and women, charitable men and women, fasting men and women, chaste men and women, men and women who remember God often — God has prepared forgiveness and a rich reward" (Qur'an 33:35). Equality doesn't make them identical however: in the Qur'an men and women are assigned different roles in the temporal world. For example, men are instructed to support their wives in all respects, and from this stem a number of distinctions, among them differential inheritance rights.
- **Gender segregation is not mandatory in Islam.** There is nothing in the Qur'an that says women cannot work or participate in public life alongside men. The history of

Islam, from its origins, is full of strong-willed, dynamic women — including the Prophet’s most famous wives, Khadija and Aisha — who played an active role in society, leading men on the battlefield and in the marketplace.

- **The Qur’an is not the only source of guidance for Muslims**, who also turn to famous collections of *hadith*, or accounts of the sayings and actions of the Prophet. Some *hadith* — particularly those relating to women — are of questionable authenticity. Others are quoted out of context. Those who oppose women ascending to positions of power cite the Prophet as saying, “A people ruled by a woman will never prosper.” There is, however, a lively debate among Islamic scholars as to the generalizability of this *hadith*, and exactly what positions of authority it applies to it. Head of a mosque? A bank? A town? A country? The argument rumbles on.
- **Public opinion reveals a lot.** Beyond direct reporting, it’s interesting to look at opinion polls which gauge Muslim opinion at home and abroad. Gallup, Pew Research Center, and the World Values Survey offer interesting findings on attitudes towards female leadership in the Muslim world, as well as other topics in public and personal life.
- **Women count on women.** Muslim women are more likely than Muslim men to report having relatives or friends they could count on for help if they were in trouble.

- **Muslim women *do* rule!** Across the Muslim world women have reached positions of political prominence: a former Prime Minister of Turkey, the Minister of Foreign Trade in the United Arab Emirates, the former and current Prime Ministers of Bangladesh, to name a few. Muslim women lead multi-billion dollar businesses, prominent academic institutions, cutting-edge civil society organizations, in the Islamic world and in the West. For example, a recent executive of the largest Muslim organization in the United States is a woman, religious scholar, and a convert to Islam. These women may not be household names yet, but their rise to prominence, often scaling high walls of culturally constructed patriarchy, says a lot about the role of women in Islam.

Scenario 3: Marriage and personal freedom. A Muslim co-ed appears at student services on campus, severely shaken. Her parents have been pressuring her to marry a cousin from their village back home, but she has categorically refused. In the ensuing row, she unintentionally reveals her relationship with a fellow undergraduate who is Christian. She leaves the house, fearing her father's rage, and is looking not just for advice, but shelter and support. A few weeks later, she blogs on the subject and her story makes headlines in mainstream news outlets.

Tips

- **Marriage is a cornerstone of Islamic life**, and there is plenty in the Qur'an and *hadith* which encourages both male and female believers to marry as soon as they are ready. (In some parts of the Islamic world that is interpreted as just before or after puberty, especially in the case of girls; however, such child-marriage is not endorsed in Qur'an.) The Qur'an is clear on the rights of women in marriage, including the need for their explicit consent to a union; forced marriage is against the fundamental tenets of Islam.
- **Relationships before marriage are frowned upon in Muslim communities** because marriage is considered the only legitimate context for sexual activity. Sex before, or outside, marriage is classified as *zina*, or adultery, and is considered *haram*, forbidden. The penalty for *zina* in *sharia*, that is, Islamic law, is 100 lashes for unmarried persons; however, proving guilt under *sharia* requires the eyewitness testimony of four people who saw the couple in the act, or the uncoerced testimony of the individuals in question; without this proof, there can be no punishment. Honor-related violence, in which families punish female relatives for transgressions of family honor — more often than not connected to accusations of sexual

transgression — are not condoned in Islam; they are a relic of patriarchal culture and, as such, not exclusive to Muslim communities.

- **Muslim men are allowed to marry Christians or Jewish women, but not necessarily the other way around.** The Qur'an specifically permits marriage by Muslim men to women who are *ahl il kitab*, or People of the Book, a reference to the holy texts of Christianity and Judaism, which are recognized by Islam. It also enjoins women believers not to marry *kuffar*, or unbelievers. But the Qur'an is silent on whether Muslim women can marry non-Muslim men. In the face of such gaps, over centuries, Islamic jurisprudence developed a number of tools to try to arrive at rules on such issues. This is a complex affair, and many Muslims prefer to seek a non-binding legal opinion — that is, a *fatwa* — from a religious authority, be it the local imam at their mosque, one of the established *fatwa*-granting bodies in the Muslim world, call-in shows on satellite TV or websites. However, legal opinions can vary, particularly where there are multiple interpretations of text. On the issue of Muslim women marrying non-Muslims, there are *fatwas* both for and against the practice. So, in the case in question, both the young woman's desire and her parents' objections to her marriage to a Christian can find justification on Islamic grounds.

- **Tread carefully.** Islam exhorts believers to keep their personal lives private; “letting it all hang out” in public *à la* Oprah or Dr. Phil is not part of Islamic culture, for all the chatter in the blogosphere. Probe cautiously, particularly on questions of sexual behavior. Respecting another’s cultural sensitivities isn’t pulling punches; it’s part of responsible journalism.
- **Keep it in context.** To put local opinions in a national context, you might want to take a look at the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life’s [US Religious Landscape Survey](#), a fascinating glimpse into Muslim American views on a wide range of issues from politics to sexuality.

When women and Islam converge to make headlines, it often involves the issues we’ve covered. But there are many more ways to look at the lives of Muslim women in America, as there are for those of any religious background. For alternatives to the mainstream news sources, here are some additional sources to consider:

- [100 questions about Islam](#). A series of short videos, produced by the British Council and partners, in which Islamic scholars and prominent Muslims answer key questions about Islam and its place in the modern world. How does the role of women affect Muslim—Western relations? Does the *hijab* prevent women from contributing to society?
- [Azizah](#). A glossy magazine for Muslim women, published out of Atlanta. Now entering its second decade, its articles

range from broad questions of gender and faith to fun and fashion on the home front. If *Marie Claire* heeded the call to prayer, it might look something like this.

- [*Emel*](#). A Muslim lifestyle magazine, published in the UK, but with story ideas relevant to Muslim men and women living in America too — travel, fashion, food, music, and provocative features on Islam in the modern world. An interesting read for any creed.
- [*Muslim Girl*](#). An online magazine for the college-age crowd, a little edgier in its religion and politics, but an interesting glimpse at some of the issues concerning young Muslim women today.
- [*Muslimah Media Watch*](#). This site has a collection of daily blogs and weekly round-ups of news relating to Muslim women from around the world. These bloggers don't just aggregate, they excoriate, providing often sharp commentary on how international media cover women in Islam. The web page is a spiky read and a good source for lesser-known news.
- [*Women Living Under Muslim Laws*](#). A website which promotes women's equality in the Islamic world, and useful source of news and critical analysis of both *sharia* and secular law in Islamic countries, particularly as it relates to women's bodily autonomy.

- [*Women's Islamic Initiative in Spirituality and Equality \(WISE\)*](#). This site was founded by the controversial Daisy Khan, best known for her work on the Park51 Islamic community center in lower Manhattan, which opponents labeled the “Ground-Zero Mosque.” It examines the ways women’s empowerment can be achieved within the framework of Islam. Progressive views are advocated on a wide range of issues, including inheritance rights, divorce, women’s education, and domestic violence. The site includes as a roll-call of prominent Muslim women from around the world, from the dawn of Islam in Arabia to 21st-century America. In essence, WISE is an alternative voice on pressing issues for Muslim women around the world, with suggestions for readings, other sources and expert consultation.
- [*Sisters in Islam*](#). Based in Malaysia, this organization is one of the leading voices in Islamic feminism, with a focus on Islamic family law. The organization’s website presents an alternative voice on women’s rights within Islam from a lesser-known part of the Islamic world for Western journalists.

Other websites:

- There are a number of English websites that originate in the Muslim world and are aimed at mixed audiences of Muslims and non-Muslims. Two examples of these are [*Islamonline.com*](#) and [*Onislam.net*](#). These particular

websites usually offer more conservative points of view and, as expected, this viewpoint affects their analyses and news. As with all the sites listed on this guide, think about bias — yours and theirs — and how it influences the way facts are presented.



South Asian Islam

Conflict and Change

By Syed Javed Nazir



OF the estimated 1.6 billion Muslims across the world, close to half a billion live in South Asia as more Muslims inhabit this region than anywhere else in the world. South Asia

also includes Bangladesh and Pakistan; they started off as one country but split in 1971 to follow separate destinies. The trajectory of Islam in both these countries in recent decades has been different as well: Bangladesh has generally followed what scholars deem a more spiritual and ‘quietist’ Islamic tradition, while Pakistan continues to dig itself deeper into a more militant and radicalized version of the religion.

Merchants and Sufi saints made up the first wave of people heading to South Asia from the Arabian Peninsula in the seventh century and they were responsible for the spread of Islam in South Asia. Scholars say this happened long before Central Asian Muslims projected their power to northern India. The Mughal Empire came at the end of these conquests and lasted more than three centuries (1526–1856). Those who were in the forefront of Islamic expansion

made plenty of room for local cultures and traditions to thrive alongside Islam. This inevitably resulted in a unique blend that contrasted with the Islamic practices in Arab world.

Many of the key intellectual, spiritual and political developments across global Islam have actually had their origins in South Asia. Scholars also recognize the diversity in the ethnic backgrounds and practices of Islam in Asia. A wave of revivalism is now impacting moderate and radical Muslims. The puritanical Sunni sect of Wahhabism is making inroads at the expense of Sufism, a more mystical variant of Islam that South Asian Muslims historically preferred to practice. Indeed, the revivalist narrative has a complex relationship with the intensity of radicalization. The revivalist narrative from Afghanistan and Pakistan is now feeding resurgent sentiments among Southeast Asian Muslims as well.

Pakistan

ALTHOUGH most Pakistanis perceive themselves as moderate Muslims, a small vociferous minority of extremists has sought to dominate the conversation about the role of religion. Pakistan was a project especially created in 1947 to serve as a homeland for South Asia's Muslim population. It has failed to successfully evolve into a modern state owing to multiple factors including religious extremism. Muslims and non-Muslims alike are watching its descent into chaos. Religion, ethnicity, and sectarianism are increasingly defining identity politics here.

Religion as a marker of identity

ISLAM has always been perceived as the central component of Pakistani national identity. Pakistan's founding father, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, however, wanted the country to be a secular democracy. He died soon after the creation of Pakistan and so did his dream of a secular state. Subsequent governments, right down to the present day, have used Islam to define the country's identity. In an ethnically divided state, religion was considered to be an effective glue to hold it together. Likewise, religion has been invoked to counter foreign threats, for example from India.

Pro-Western governments in Pakistan have relied on the same strategy. Their efforts have been aimed more at managing the militant religiosity that swept across Pakistan in the mid-1980s than discouraging it. Zia-ul-Haq ruled Pakistan from 1977 to 1988 and had a bigger hand in radicalizing Pakistan than any other government. A staunch U.S. ally against the Soviets, he led Pakistan into the war in Afghanistan alongside the United States in the 1980s.

He introduced Islamic norms and laws in what is called the Islamization process. He was singlehandedly responsible for imposing an Islamic curriculum across all schools run by the state and triggering sectarian divisions in the country by introducing *sharia* laws. Washington needed him for his support against the Soviets in Afghanistan at the time and did not object to the execution of his fundamentalist agenda in Pakistan. Nevertheless, there were Pakistani voices caution-

ing against ignoring the lethal consequences of extremism down the line. Pakistan became a front-line state in the last decisive phase of the Cold War. It willingly took on the role of a massive conduit for American arms and money to be used against the Soviets in Afghanistan and beyond. Zia-ul-Haq used this leverage to advance his Islamic agenda at home and hastened Pakistan's nuclear program. Scholars argue that Zia-ul-Haq's efforts to transform Pakistan's identity were not an isolated act; these were part of a carefully nurtured state ideology.

Today there is a huge question about Islam and its role in contemporary Pakistani society. Of course, Pakistan's various political and religious formations have their worldviews which are defined more by shrill disagreement than consensus. Scholars also point out the polarity between religious entities and a moderate majority.

The seminaries

MADRASSAS (seminaries) have been operating in Pakistan for decades but they took on more activist and fundamentalist dimensions with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Saudi money has had a lot to do with their increasing influence. The Taliban, after receiving their education from these institutions, overran Afghanistan after the withdrawal of Soviet troops and consolidated their grip on a fractious nation. The movement was created by students and religious leaders who rose up against the civil war that erupted after the defeat of the Soviets. They established an Islamic republic inspired by

Wahhabi teachings and Pashtun tribal traditions. It was a literal and extreme interpretation of Sunni Islam.

Since 9/11, *madrassas* have been portrayed in the West as incubators for Islamic extremism. That is not entirely true, but it is indisputable that they offer religious education and free lodging for the poor.

According to scholars, there are two main streams of Sufi Islam in South Asia: Brelvi and Deobandi. Close to a million and half children study in an estimated 10,000 seminaries. However, it is problematic that these seminaries impart knowledge in Arabic and Persian through what are essentially medieval texts. Some texts are polemical in nature and run counter to a modernist view of things. There is no doubt that some ultra-orthodox Muslims have been exposed to one rather selective aspect of *jihad*. Clerics educated by some of these seminaries are extremely intolerant of views that sound contrary to their received wisdom.

Foreign policy and Islam

THE war on terror and the growing American influence on the Pakistani government have paved the way for a pro-Western foreign policy. But the domestic policies of recent Pakistani governments, including those of General Musharraf, have been supportive of the religious formations internally to “balance the anti-American backlash.”

The present elected PPP government in Pakistan (2011) is liberal in orientation. However, Pakistan’s infamous blasphemy laws are still en-

forced with the same rigor as when they were introduced by Zia-ul-Haq in the 1980s, reflecting of the influence of the extremists. However, no religious party or group in Pakistan has been strong enough to influence the ballot box. Historically, Pakistanis have blocked the entry of extremists into the corridors of power. The continuing U.S. drone attacks in the mountainous regions of Pakistan and the resultant loss of lives, the presence of American forces in Afghanistan, CIA operations deep within the Pakistani territory, and the general direction of the U.S war against terrorism are swelling the ranks of fundamentalists in Pakistan.

Bangladesh

FOR Bangladesh, Islam did not become the central component of its national identity. Its inclusive politics and the absence of a major dispute with its immediate neighbors has stymied the influence of radicals. Because the public space in Bangladesh has more secular voices, it discourages Arab money from flowing into the coffers of religious groups.

India

ISLAM arrived in India in the eighth century through military conquests followed by migration and conversion. Muslims constitute India's largest minority (160 million) with a history of a difficult relationship with the majority. Contrary to the progression of politics of religion in Pakistan, Indian Muslims appear to have embraced more

tolerant and inclusive religious traditions, prompting these remarks from Thomas Friedman of *The New York Times* in a post-9/11 column: “Why can’t Muslims elsewhere be like Indian Muslims?” Because Indian Muslims live in a democracy and vote en bloc, their place is determined in the grand scheme of things in India. They are more inward-looking and their energies are consumed for the most part in negotiating with the majority. Historically, Muslims in South Asia lived among or ruled massive non-Muslim populations, hence they chose to resist puritanical interpretations of Islam. They were more than willing to synthesize Islam with local customs.

Afghanistan

AFGHANISTAN is another country in South Asia where Islam and politics intersect. Islam has always occupied an important place in the lives of ordinary Afghans; but the Soviet occupation of their country, and the subsequent Western response to it, spawned a religious nationalism that is driving politics today in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The “blowback” phenomenon is observed in the ascendancy of the Taliban and what is called the Talibanization of societies in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The presence of al-Qaeda and its affiliates in the border regions of these two countries has added combustibility to the situation. The Taliban will not fade away and will go on posing a security challenge to weak governments in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Some questions worth exploring

Why such an intense interest in South Asian Islam at this time?

South Asian Islam has been the focus of interest for reporters and scholars for various reasons. Of immediate interest and concern now for both media and academia is the incendiary mix of religion and politics. Some scholars argue that nowhere in the world has this mix appeared more deadly than South Asia. They maintain that religion propelled politics in South Asia long before the late 20th-century manifestation of religiosity across the Muslim world. The partition of India came about because of the divisive role of religion in the subcontinent. It is naïve to believe, as some indeed do in the West, that South Asian Muslims exist on the margins of the Islamic “heartland” of Middle East. Arabs constitute just about 15 percent of the world’s Muslims. The religion in South Asia comes in handy as a marker of identity — and as an extremely potent means of mobilizing politics.

What has caused the Islamic resurgence in South Asia? Scholars have identified some key factors that triggered revivalist sentiments in South Asia. South Asian societies have been impacted by globalization and Western culture. Growing industrialization and urbanization in some South Asian countries, particularly those with an authoritarian ruling elite, have produced a massive new underclass in search of identity. In an environment

characterized by inequality and deprivation, membership of religious groups and parties has given this underclass a sense of identity and empowerment. Most of this class came from the rural hinterland and experienced a sense of inferiority vis-à-vis its well-heeled urban counterpart. Extremist religious entities have pushed their agenda through this class.

Developments overseas such as the Iraq war and the war in Afghanistan have contributed significantly to Islamic revivalism. Add the Arab-Israeli conflict and the conflict between India and Pakistan over Kashmir, and the situation becomes truly heartening for the forces of extremism. In part, anti-American sentiments among Muslims have been ignited by Washington's almost unconditional support for Israel and American backing for the repressive regimes in the Middle East.

Are there conflicting values among South Asian Muslims? Scholars argue that the dramatic fading of Islamic power in the face of European colonial expansion prompted two strands of thinking among Muslims. Deviation from the true path of Islam, according to some, was the cause of decline. Others viewed this decline as resulting from a failure to modernize their societies and institutions. In essence, the focus is on how to preserve Muslim culture and civilization in times of globalization, and the perceived need to strike a balance between tradition and modernity. There is a quiet struggle now under way between the

moderates, who indeed make up the majority, and the extremists. This phenomenon is much in evidence in Pakistan. The extremists are well-organized and well-funded and are seeking power and influence both through the ballot and the gun.

A huge population of small traders and shopkeepers also represent the middle class in South Asian society; they have traditionally been supportive of the religious groups and political parties.

What is the role of the puritanical Wahhabism strand of Sunni Islam?

There is little doubt that the puritanical Wahhabi sect of Islam, a vintage Saudi import in South Asian societies, has stoked the fire of revivalism. Wahhabism is an 18th-century movement that emphasizes a strict interpretation of the sacred text and a rigid practice of religion. It presents a stark contrast to the traditional mystical approach to Islam in South Asia. Saudi money has been flowing into the seminaries run by the extremists like the Taliban and others. Indeed, these seminaries embody a long-term strategy to Arabize South Asian Islam.

Countries like Pakistan have degenerated into battlefields for foreign ideologies. In recent decades Iranian money too has been flowing into the hands of Shiites and their places of worship in Pakistan. Pakistan's Shiite minority has been restive in recent years, frequently in open conflict with extremists among the Sunni majority. The roots of this conflict lie far beyond the

borders of Pakistan. Scholars point out the enduring links between Wahhabism and the Saudi dynasty. Similarly the Iranian revolution of 1979 gave birth to a revolutionary approach that has spread to elements within Shiite communities across the Muslim world.

What role has Political Islam played? The end of British colonial rule in 1947 signaled the start of a struggle between Islamic traditionalists, who saw the dismantling of the colonial structure as a huge opportunity to assert their influence, and the modernists, who wanted Western values like democracy, pluralism, and the rule of law to prevail. Fast-forward to 2011, the modernists or modernizers are now feeling deluged by the deafening rhetoric of the extremists and their institutions. The fundamentalists are led by a hardcore of fiery ideologues and strategists: they are clearly aiming to take effective control of society. Their sources of income are stable and, some argue, growing. The pervasive poverty and lack of social justice in Islamic societies provide a fertile ground for their activism. In Bangladesh education has served as an effective antidote to extremist ideologies. Could the same happen in Pakistan? Much depends on how the war against terror in Afghanistan plays out. If the Taliban remain undefeated there, Pakistani extremists will continue to proliferate. The future, at least the next 10 years, points to more chaos and destabilization.

Can Pakistan climb out of the abyss of extremism? It is trying to do so, for the militants are not scoring any major gains so far. They are zealously guarding their past territorial and legislative gains. The border region with Afghanistan remains their area of influence and they are resisting both Pakistani and American attacks. The robust defense of blasphemy laws is an indication of their resolve to keep pushing the country in direction that favors indoctrination by them.

Where do we go from here? Will the fanatic fringe acquire critical mass in years ahead and force the fundamentals of South Asian Islam to shift in any significant manner? No, it is not likely. Muslims in India and Bangladesh, who represent more than twice the number of Muslims living in Pakistan, are averse to the militancy characterizing the extremist narrative from the Middle East and Pakistan.

Within Pakistan itself the extremists continue to be as lethal a presence for state and society as they are for the U.S. But their fortunes are declining as a force in party politics as evidenced by the results of May 11, 2013, elections in Pakistan.

The Pakistani voters rejected the extremists on election day (the turnout was 55 percent with a sizable presence of women voters). Having no faith in the electoral process, the extremists declared the elections un-Islamic and threatened to disrupt political campaigns and the voting process. In fact, the extremist organi-

zations and their leaders had detected a deep sense of alienation among Pakistani voters toward the extremist narrative. This was the backdrop to the militants' resort to violence targeting the critical voices during the campaign phase.

In a wave of terrorist attacks across Pakistan, mainly against the liberal and democratic parties, 126 people lost their lives and 500 were injured. The Taliban, al-Qaeda and other militant forces revealed their desperation and loss of influence over thinking Pakistanis. In a strong sense, Pakistanis demonstrated their resilience in coming out to vote despite a huge terrorist threat. Can democracy block and undercut the advances made by the militants in recent years? This question is still hard to answer. But there is hope.

Although there is limited data that provides insight into the Pakistani public's attitude toward violence and militancy, the studies that have been carried out point to low support for the extremists. According to a 2009 Pew survey, only 9 percent of respondents believed that violence, particularly suicide bombings, was justified. More importantly, 81 percent considered the Taliban as a critical threat. This is a huge jump from pre-9/11 days, when most Pakistanis were ambivalent toward threats posed by the Taliban and al-Qaeda.

Pakistanis cringe at the way their country is perceived by the rest of the world: a haven for terrorism. They want to project a positive image to the outside world. In a sense India's rejec-

tion of the extreme Hindu ideology a decade ago and emphatic re-embracing of secularism is sure to encourage Pakistanis who share the same racial and cultural matrix. The sense of comparison is natural. The peace and tranquility surrounding lives of Indian Muslims notwithstanding their existential issues with Hindus make an attractive reality.

Pakistanis have also been looking to the Middle East for inspiration. Unfortunately the souring of the Egyptian dream and events in Syria do give mixed signals to Pakistanis. There are more layers to Pakistani militancy than elsewhere: Pakistanis have been traumatized by a string of sectarian attacks against the Shia community in Quetta, Karachi, Peshawar and Lahore in the months preceding the elections. The blame for violence against the Pakistani Shia is laid at the door of fanatical militant outfits who seek an emirate buoyed by Wahhabism.

Meanwhile, militants threaten Christians in Pakistan on a regular basis. The increasing number of attacks on Pakistan's 3-million-strong Christian community is unmistakably linked to terrorist entities. The average Pakistani is horrified at these developments. And part of his/her anger and frustration is reflected by the results of the May 11, 2013 elections.

America's programmed exit from Afghanistan will help douse the anti-Americanism now manifesting itself in Pakistan. Public opinion leaders believe that while the orientations of *madrassa* (seminaries) culture in Pakistan remain profoundly

antagonistic to modernity and openness, these will continue to perform what *The New York Times* described in one of its post-9/11 editorials as “universities of terror.” Changes in Arab societies can and will sever the life-line for these seminaries. But it is important to note that those *madrassas* that foment extremist ideologies are the minority; a large number of these seminaries are still making genuine contributions to public sector education in Pakistan.

It would appear that the global — and Pakistani — media’s obsession with the militants’ activities is a cause of some concern. For instance, most Pakistanis live normal lives like normal people anywhere else. They are seldom the focus of Western media’s attention; on the other hand, the militants, even though microscopic in numbers, hog headlines. This lends the fanatics a sense of power far beyond their actual influence and capacities.

South Asian Islam has the strength and uniqueness to keep at bay the militants knocking at its door. The unceasing revivalist drumbeat has only added a layer of vacuous ritualism to the lives of those South Asian Muslims who felt shaky in terms of their identity. Self-correction will follow before long. Such is the resilience of Islam in South Asia.



Digital Islam

By Philip N. Howard



DIGITAL media has changed the way political, social, and religious conversations take place in many parts of the world. Many countries have large Muslim communities and, while some of these countries are democracies getting better at being democratic, others are quite authoritarian. The Internet plays an important role in society in two respects.

First, the Internet has become the means by which average people discuss and debate the principles of Islamic faith. For many centuries, social elites have dominated such debates, and actively used media to project their own interpretations of the Qur'an onto large populations. Indeed, religious leaders actively discouraged public discussions of faith and provided organized ways of having religious edicts made by qualified mullahs, muftis, and ayatollahs. The Internet has upset several of the formal, organized ways of practicing Islam.

Young people turn to the Internet to consult with spiritual leaders in other countries. What does love mean in a culture of arranged marriages? Should daughters have access to the same schools as sons?

People debate these issues online, sometimes without being moderated or supervised by religious elites.

Second, the Internet has become the means by which a growing number of Muslims — particularly cohorts of middle-class, urban youth — develop their political and social identity. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, SMS, and a host of other digital tools are allowing the citizens of many countries to get more international news and other perspectives on domestic political life.

Most of the time, the Internet is used more for entertainment and shopping than news and politics. But at key moments, during military crises, rigged elections, or humanitarian disasters, digital media become especially important. Such technologies are difficult for regimes to control, and authoritarian regimes have been especially ham-handed at managing political conversations online.

Young people use the Internet to read about life in other countries, to fact check things their own government tells them, and to find other citizens who might share similar perspectives on the issues of the day. Sometimes this means that radical fundamentalists find each other.

But the larger, more consistent trend seems to be that people with relatively moderate political opinions find that they have shared grievances and, if living under authoritarian regimes, that there are ways of organizing against their dictator.

If the Internet has had an impact on Islam, has Islam had an impact on the Internet?

WHILE the Internet has rapidly spread around the world, it is not simply a tool for promoting Western culture and values. There is significant diversity in the languages and cultures of Muslims around the world, and, as people from these cultures go online, they contribute interesting new tools and forms of content. Indeed, the Internet and mobile phones are being culturally adapted to meet local needs. In Indonesia and Malaysia, SMS texting has led to new literary forms such as the *Lebaran SMS Pantun*, rhyming verses sent by text on holidays. The *al Quran Seluler* service streams Koranic passages to mobile phones. Mobile *Syariah* banking allows Muslims to conform to local lending practices. The Islamic laws governing commercial transactions are formal and complex, which makes them ideal problem sets for computer modeling in software applications that can be used on multiple devices.

A Dubai-based telecommunications firm offers the Ilkone i800 handset to stream Koranic verse, search religious documents, and indicate the *qiblah* or direction of Mecca for prayers. Marginalized political minorities have created online communities that allow debate and discussion simply not found offline, such as the [Gay and Lesbian Arabic Society](#). As more and more people from diverse cultures use digital media, it is reasonable to expect a flourishing of new forms of cultural expression in digital form.

For example, [Islam Online](#) was set up by Egyptian Islamist intellectuals and operates as a news portal, filtering news, culture, and religious issues through its own Islamic filter. The site operates in both English and Arabic, because it wants to expand its footprint to all parts of the non-Arabic-speaking Muslim world. It is also a place where Muslims from around the world seek advice on spiritual matters and find competing interpretations of Islamic jurisprudence as scholars from around the globe weigh in with responses.

The Muslim world pays attention to Islam Online

A CRISIS faced the website in 2010 when its Qatar-based leadership called for changes in its format. Its Cairo-based staff resisted, saying they feared that the moves would erase some of the website's moderate influences. But the Qatar-based leadership said they wanted the website to have less of an Egyptian view and to reach more Muslims globally. The concern stirred in the Muslim world by the debate showed the power of the website that had begun about a decade before as a student project.

But Islam Online is not the only voice that has grown on the Internet.

English-language websites such as [efatwa.com](#), [muftisays.com](#), and [Ask the Imam](#) offer advice, and both mullahs and muftis lead discussions in many other forums and chat rooms in a vast range of languages. The "[FatwaBase](#)" is a downloadable archive of scholarly

opinion on Koranic interpretation. In countries like Iran, where elections are often rigged, mainstream political parties hoping to win office aggressively use digital media.

Iran, Islamic politics, and the Internet

IN recent years Iranians have come to expect their political candidates to be online — candidates without a web presence simply do not appear modern. Challenger candidates usually avail themselves of more than just websites, however. Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's campaign blog kept his supporters up to date, responded to political spin, and took donations in support of his campaign.

In his 2009 campaign against Ahmadinejad, Iranian former prime minister Mir Hossein Mousavi's use of digital campaign tools was a strategic response to his exclusion from coverage by state-run television and newspapers. He used Facebook to reach out to voters, alert them to his public appearances, and help them build a sense of community. Months after the election, he maintained a dedicated YouTube channel and Twitter feed. Iran watchers have noted that women were particularly active in civic discourse during the elections, engaging in political conversations at new levels and in ways rarely seen in offline public interaction.

With political upheaval in the region in early 2011, Iranian opposition to theocratic rule was again mobilized through digital media.

How the Internet spread the word of a reclusive religious leader and empowered Iraqi Shiites

GRAND ayatollah Ali Hussaini Sistani is a leader of Iraq's Shiites, who followed in the tradition of quietism or leading through religious reflection out of the public glare. But he and his supporters decided in the late 1990s that the Internet was a way of reaching millions and it was very compatible with Islamic precepts.

And so the reclusive religious became a lively source of information on everything from daily life to political questions when Saddam Hussein's regime was overthrown. His website (sistani.com) was sought out by hundreds daily amid the chaos and upheaval.

Have digital media had an impact on journalism in the Muslim world?

DIGITAL media have had an impact both on the system of political communication and on journalism in many Muslim countries. A "media system" used to be thought of as a well-articulated system in which, for the most part, print journalists generate original information and break news stories, television and satellite broadcasts pass information to a mass audience, and radio customizes news content and provides some interaction. The Internet and mobile phones have made the system much more complex.

Independent journalists play a critical role in every healthy de-

mocracy. In many different kinds of Muslim countries, new media technologies are transforming the way news is both produced and consumed. Journalists use the Internet to carry out research and to publish their content beyond the reach of government censors.

Professional associations of journalists, such as the [al Urdun al Jadid \(New Jordan\) Research Center](#) in Jordan, run online training sessions to teach journalists how to use the country's new access to information law. Citizens use the Internet to learn about public affairs outside their country, and some even become amateur journalists by providing photos, videos, and text describing political and security crises as they live through them.

In many Muslim countries, the Internet is used for news during times of particular social crisis, when citizens need to verify national news stories with international reports, or when domestic journalists are so constrained that independent journalism — and certainly oppositional editorializing — is only conducted online by writers living in other countries.

Large news organizations in the Muslim world find that they must provide some free content and are struggling to find stable revenue sources. Yet contemporary newsrooms can also be small, agile, and distributed organizations. Even traditional television newsrooms, many of which developed professional practices suited for maintaining the ideological control of ruling elites, have evolved new practices because of the capacities and constraints of the Internet.

Whereas news organizations in the Arab world were once de-

scribed as “stagnant, centralized, monolithic, and apathetic to audience views,” the launch of multimedia commercial news organizations has helped raise standards, allowing for more professional and pluralistic approaches to news production. In part, these changes have taken place because the Internet has supported widespread conversation among journalists about professional ethics.

As in the West, ethics codes in Southern Europe, North Africa, the Middle East, and Muslim Asia, embodied in professional codes of conduct and taught in journalism schools, hold that truth and objectivity should be central values of journalism. One difference may be that Islamic journalism is normatively geared toward protecting the private sphere over the public sphere.

Much online debate has broken out over the degree to which and the ways in which journalists must respect or tolerate political, national, religious, or cultural boundaries in their work. Moreover, for the journalists who do not accept professional socialization about what these boundaries should be, the Internet is a means of internationally distributing content that could not be shared domestically.

Is the Internet helping the cause of Islamic hardliners or terrorists?

OVER the last decade, the Muslim world has developed an enormous, mainstream, political discourse online and this is due in large part to the proliferation of political party websites. The politi-

cal web sphere, even in countries where formal political parties are banned, is increasingly vibrant and competitive. At the same time, Western security agencies have been very good at shutting down the websites of radical terrorists, almost as soon as they go up. A small, dedicated group of regional experts maintain websites that report on new homepages for terrorist groups and new threads of conversations by radicals in other virtual forums.

Countries where political parties have a strong supporting ICT (information and communication technology) infrastructure have developed websites that do more than provide policy papers and party manifestos. They offer text (and sometimes recordings) of speeches from party officials, biographical information on leaders and electoral candidates, and the voting records of legislators. They have dedicated areas for party members and offer news feeds with a particular ideological spin. These websites are the most accessible and detailed sources of party information, unmediated by the news editors, state regulators, or media broadcasters.

What are the lessons for the West?

LET'S review the impact of the Internet on the Muslim world. We have seen many trends take place and the most important are as follows.

- *First*, Islamic fundamentalists may dominate the discussion in parts of the Muslim world but a larger net-

work of citizens now has political clout, largely because of social media. For example, the Muslim Brotherhood's face-to-face organizing and drive to influence political, religious and community groups is no longer the only way to organize political opposition. Even the Muslim Brotherhood faces a digital challenge, as younger members have used their voices online to assert their views of what the organization should be. In a digital world, older ideologically recalcitrant political parties may not even be the most effective way to organize effective political opposition.

- *Second*, democratization has become more about social networks than political change driven by elites. The U.S. needs to spot when a dictator's social networks fragment to the point that he is incapable of managing his regime. More urgently, the U.S. needs to take serious note when networks of family and friends align — increasingly through digital media — on a set of grievances that political elites simply cannot or will not address.

One of the most thorough investigative projects, the [OpenNet Initiative](#), found that in some countries, filtering initially dealt with pornographic websites and sexually explicit content, and then was extended to forms of political culture online. This mission creep sometimes occurs slowly, as government officials learn to use their

ensorship systems, but it can also occur suddenly, during unexpected domestic or international security incidents. Some governments make use of Western software tools, including [Websense](#), [McAfee](#) and [Netsweeper](#) to do government-level filtering.

What was the role of the Internet in the “Arab Spring”?

AT the start of 2011 significant changes began rumbling through North Africa and the Middle East. Zine El Abidine Ben Ali had ruled Tunisia for 20 years, and Hosni Mubarak had reigned in Egypt for 30 years. Yet their bravest challengers were 20- and 30-year-olds without ideological baggage, violent intentions, or clear leaders. Political change in these countries inspired activists across the region. Some tough authoritarian governments responded with tear gas and rubber bullets, others with policy concessions, bribes, and cabinet shuffles.

The groups that initiated and sustained protests had few meaningful experiences with public deliberation or voting, and little experience with successful protesting. These young citizens were politically disciplined, pragmatic, and collaborative. Young people growing up in modern, entrenched, authoritarian regimes find their own political inspirations and aspirations, such as through the now famous Facebook page “We Are All Khaled Said,” which hosted content drawing inspiration from Tunisia and supporting civic action in Egypt

Digitally enabled protesters in Tunisia tossed out their dictator.

The protests in Egypt brought out the largest crowds in 50 years and the Mubarak regime was overturned. Several autocrats have had to dismiss their cabinets. Discontent has cascaded over transnational networks of family and friends in Algeria, Jordan, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Lebanon, and Yemen.

Social protests have cascaded across North Africa and the Middle East largely because digital media allowed communities to realize that they shared grievances and had transportable strategies for mobilizing against dictators. This “Arab Spring” is not about traditional political actors, such as unions, political parties, or radical fundamentalists. It has drawn together networks of people, many of whom have not been political before: young entrepreneurs, government workers, and the urban middle class.

Digital media didn’t oust Mubarak, but they did provide the medium by which soulful calls for freedom cascaded across North Africa and the Middle East. It is difficult to know how the Arab Spring will turn out, but we can already say something about the political casualties, long-term regional consequences, and the modern recipe for democratization.

It all started with a desperate Tunisian shopkeeper who set himself on fire, which activated a transnational network of citizens exhausted by authoritarian rule. Within weeks, digitally enabled protesters in Tunisia tossed out their dictator. It was social media that spread both the discontent and inspiring stories of success from Tunisia across North Africa and into the Middle East.

Have citizen journalists had a role in the new structure of political communication in the Muslim world?

AUTHORITARIAN regimes are especially sensitive to the efforts of citizen journalists, who use digital technologies to research and expose graft and corruption. In 2008, bloggers reconstructed flight paths for the Tunisian president's plane using photos from plane watchers across Europe — at times when the Tunisian leader was known to be in-country. The research revealed that the president's wife had been using the plane for shopping trips, which greatly eroded the leader's credibility.

Indeed, in many countries across North Africa and the Middle East, citizens doing their own investigative work created the most trouble for authoritarian regimes. Home-made documentaries and online opinion pieces have had the effect, over time, of eroding the credibility of dictators, especially on the topic of corruption.

Egyptian blogger Abdul-Moneim Mahmud, one of the young Muslim Brotherhood bloggers, reported on “arbitrary arrests and acts of torture by the [Egyptian state] security services” as a way of criticizing the excesses of state coercion (ana-ikhwan.blogspot.com).

Similarly, Egyptian Abdel Kareem Nabil Suleiman used his blog to “condemn the government's authoritarian excesses” (karam903.blogspot.com). Both were arrested for their critical posts.

Digital media drive the news media

WHILE Al Jazeera is an important part of the changing news diet for many people in the Arabic-speaking world, it is a news organization that is very heavily dependent on digital media.

First, its news desks rely on a steady flow of photos, story ideas, and tips from average citizens, and it is not uncommon for content from in-country citizens to be aired with minimal fact checking or editorial oversight.

Second, while its news product is broadcast as part of cable and satellite services, some stories get additional circulation by being passed over referral networks of family and friends. This means that distant diaspora communities see content not originally meant for them, and that when dictators ban Al Jazeera for unflattering coverage this does not end the penetration of Al Jazeera content into domestic politics.

As the uprising spread in the spring of 2011 to Syria, the Internet became a tool that Internet dissidents coordinated from outside the country. Here, *New York Times* reporter Anthony Shadid, [writing from Beirut](#), describes the work of these dissidents and the Internet network they created (Shadid died in February 2012 during a reporting trip inside Syria):

Several say they relied on Syrian businessmen — abroad or in Syria — to finance one of their most impressive feats. After witnessing the Egyptian government's success in shutting down the Internet and mobile phone networks in January, they made a concerted attempt to circumvent

a similar move by delivering satellite phones and modems across Syria. Ammar Abdulhamid, an activist in Maryland, estimated that they delivered 100 satellite phones, along with hundreds of cameras and laptops.

The impromptu network has been allowed to guide events against a government that hews to the Soviet-era notion of Information Ministries and communiqués.

So, too, in Saudi Arabia there's been a digital revolution. As this [New York Times story explains](#), Saudis have increasingly turned to Twitter to say things that can't be said reported publicly.

RIYADH, Saudi Arabia — Saudi Arabia did not have an Arab Spring. But it has had a revolution of sorts.

Open criticism of this country's royal family, once unheard-of, has become commonplace in recent months. Prominent judges and lawyers issue fierce public broadsides about large-scale government corruption and social neglect. Women deride the clerics who limit their freedoms. Even the king has come under attack

All this dissent is taking place on the same forum: Twitter.

What are the long-term consequences of digital media use for social movements in Muslim countries?

OVER the last decade, information technology has become an important part of the narratives about social change around the world. Not everyone will agree that information technologies changed

the opportunity structure for opposition, improved the logistics of protest organizing, or carried stories of success across North Africa and the Middle East to inspire other citizens to challenge their dictators.

But it is clear that there are political consequences of the diffusion of Internet access and mobile phones.

ICTs have had consistent roles in the narrative for social mobilization:

- Coordinating and publicizing massive mobilizations and non-violent resistance tactics against pseudo-democratic regimes after stolen elections;
- Allowing foreign governments and diaspora communities to support local democratic movements through information, electronic financial transfers, off-shore logistics, and moral encouragement;
- Organizing radical student movements to use unconventional protest tactics at sensitive moments for regimes, particularly during (rigged) elections, elite power struggles, or diplomatic visits, to undermine the appearance of regime popularity;
- Uniting opposition movements through social networking applications, shared media portals for creating and distributing digital content, and online forums for debating political strategy and public policy options;
- Attracting international news media attention and dip-

lomatic pressure through digital content, such as photos taken “on the ground” by citizens, and leaking videos and documents to foreign journalists and diplomats regarding issues such as human rights abuses, environmental disasters, electoral fraud, and political corruption.

It is a mistake to peg any sensible theory of democratization to a particular technologies, software, or websites. Social networking applications don’t cause political upheaval, people do. But people are using social media to disrupt established networks of political communication and deepen democratic institutions around the world.

What is the role of the internet in Muslim identity in the domestic politics of Western countries?

AFTER 9/11 Muslims with long-standing roots in the West found themselves mistreated and maligned in their public and private lives. News media coverage of young Muslims using the Internet often came with the trope that such digital networks were the way terrorists recruited new members. But the Internet also became a way for Muslims in the U.S., U.K., and Europe to commiserate about their social isolation. Groups such as the [Council on American Islamic Relations](#) began to effectively use the Internet to track incidents of civil rights violations and support local committees of activists. Indeed, specialized online newspapers have also sprung up over the last few years,

serving the small but vibrant communities of Muslims from many parts of the world in many Western cities ([arabamericannews](#)).

Who are the watchdogs?

IN recent years, Internet-based “watch-dog” groups sprang up. For example, [Campus Watch](#) uses crowd-sourced information about what scholars are saying about Middle East politics, but has itself been criticized for being too pro-Israel. There is a small community of observers who track, sometimes as volunteers, the spread of anti-Western hatred and the organization of fundamentalist groups. Some of these researchers offer extensive databases, some provide notes and comments on, and translations of the activities they find in chat rooms, blogs, and websites. Some are managed by professional researchers, others are not and are blatantly Islamophobic — for many it is difficult to tell the difference. Journalists using these websites (see Resources section) should fully explore the ideological interests of these groups before treating information from these sources as reliable.

Why the Internet is an important tool for journalists covering Islam

THE Internet has both shrunk the world and enlarged it. Today we travel thousands of miles in seconds online and we hear, as well, many more voices than ever before.

To do your best, you need to know where to find information, who are your best and most knowledgeable sources, and why the events you are covering matter.

You can do this all online and you need to do so because of the endless doors that it opens for you. Learn how to open these doors to do better reporting and learn what to do once you enter these great halls of digital information.



Reporter's Notebook: Cutting through the Babble

By Reshma Memon Yaqub

post-gazette.com Lifestyle

Take me to... Go

Home Lifestyle

Lifestyle

Life Support: I am not the enemy

Like every American, she is afraid - but even more afraid, because she is Muslim

Monday, September 17, 2001

By Reshma Memon Yaqub, The Washington Post

WASHINGTON -- The horror is unspeakable. Like every American, I am paralyzed by the carnage on the news, on our streets. My head pounds, thinking of the grief engulfing thousands of families whose loved ones were killed or injured Tuesday. When I close my eyes, I see bodies tumbling from the windows of skyscrapers.

As the attack unfolded, I panicked, racing through what until this moment had felt like a safe, suburban neighborhood to find my son and his baby sitter, who were playing, as usual, at a nearby park. I begged my husband, who was at work in a prominent Washington building, to come home. With the phone lines going in and out, I felt sure that it just wasn't over.

Cathy Tigam, Post Gazette

ONCE upon a news cycle, a foreign desk editor (not to be confused with a foreign editor) at the *Chicago Tribune* walked over to my desk. He had never met my feature-writing self, but he seemed to consider me (not to be confused with the brown skin holding me in) qualified to look over a wire story about Islam that he was planning to run.

I noticed that the lede contained a faulty translation of “*Bismillahi Rahmani Rahim*,” which means, “In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate.” It read, instead, “Passionate.” When I explained the error, the editor eyed me suspiciously. He all but accused me of lying to try to make my religion look ... I don’t know, better? Less weird?

“How would a major wire service possibly get that wrong?” he demanded.

“Um, I don’t know,” I did not reply out loud. “Maybe because some journalists cover Islam like a bunch of 6-year-olds playing telephone?”

“Hmmm,” I answered instead. “I’m not sure. But I am sure that this is a phrase I personally say dozens of times each day, in my prayers, before I eat, before I do pretty much anything important. And while I imagine God is pretty passionate about stuff, that’s just not what this particular phrase means.”

He grabbed the page out of my hand and stormed off.

A few years later, while working on the metro desk of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, I wrote a story that included the words “*Qur’an*” and “*Muhammad*.” I was summoned by higher ups and informed that the correct spellings were Koran and Mohammed.

“Uh, not really,” I eloquently replied.

“Well, that’s what the AP Stylebook says, and they can’t be wrong,” I was informed by a man in a suit. “Nobody argues with the Journalist’s Bible.” Which is, in fact, what the Stylebook describes itself as on its website.

“Oh,” I did not reply. “I’m sorry, I forgot. The AP Stylebook, you say? That’s the one that was divinely revealed on a mountaintop. Or wait, was it behind a burning bush?”

I replied instead, so sweetly that my sarcasm was undetectable: “Wasn’t that written by journalists like us, who have been prone to a correction or two in their lives? Hey, what if we, a news organization,

decided to break a big news story about there being a spelling mistake in the AP Stylebook?”

I did not win. But, to its credit, the AP Stylebook did eventually correct its own spellings, never having known how narrowly it avoided becoming the subject of a huge Midwestern scandal.

Later, in a different newsroom, a friendly veteran reporter informed me, “My elderly mom is getting sick and tired of seeing your foreign name on the front page. Wanna grab some lunch?”

Another colleague sought me out with this compliment: “You write really well for an Iranian.”

“Well, thanks,” I replied, knowing she was trying to be nice. I decided against mentioning that being born in DC and raised in its suburbs does qualify me as American.

Instead, I chose a middle path: “My parents are actually from Pakistan.”

“Oh, you know what I mean,” she said. “You write really well for someone for whom English isn’t even their first language.”

Because I’ve written about Islam from time to time, I’ve been asked many times to be one of those talking heads on TV news shows. I remember one news program where the questions and assumptions coming out of the host’s mouth were so blatantly anti-Muslim that I just started laughing. Full body laughing. Live. On air. The host looked so shocked. The situation grew more absurd. I laughed until tears fell from my eyes, and we went to a commercial.

As a Muslim, it pains me — really truly, it’s just not just an expres-

sion here — to see how Islam and Muslims are portrayed in the media.

It pains me what is written, and it pains me what is not written. It pains me what is said. And what is left unsaid. It pains me that, as a direct result of the views Americans have absorbed about Islam from the media, my son would prefer that his middle school classmates not know that he is Muslim.

It pains to me to the point that, three years ago, I threw out my television and canceled my newspaper subscription. I could no longer allow what passes as news (“Well, there’s no word yet on whether this missing ice cream cone is the work of Islamic extremists, but we can’t rule it out!”) to seep into the pores of my home.

What is an Islamic extremist anyway? Someone who practices Islam extremely? Like fasting two months out of the year instead of the prescribed one? Or praying more than five times a day? Or donating more than the required 2.5 percent of her savings to the poor every year? Is a Muslim fundamentalist one who practices the fundamentals of Islam — like worshipping the same God that Jews and Christians worship, and believing in the same line of prophets that they believe in?

Would it concern you to know that I have personally committed *jihad*? Twice? (Childbirth is one of the many “struggles in the way of god,” that are the true definition of that word.) And dying in childbirth, which I fortunately did not do (though my grandmother did), is one of the ways a person can be martyred in Islam.

As journalists, we have an immense responsibility. We are the writers and the producers of history. We are the teachers of the mass-

es. We are accountable for what we include. And for what we leave out. And for each word and its corresponding definition that we choose to seal in the minds of every middle school youngsters.

(Words aside, to photojournalists, may I also add: Please, for the love of God, enough with the butts in the air shots of Muslims prostrating in prayer?)

If there's just one sentence I could imprint on the mind of every journalist who covers Islam, it is this: Just because it was done by someone with brown skin or a weird name, doesn't mean that God instructed them in the Qur'an to do it.

As a responsible journalist, you wouldn't cover a school board without reading its bylaws, or the minutes of its meetings. When you cover a religion, or attribute something to it, go to an authentic source for your information. (Note: authentic sources are rarely found screaming in the streets, with a rock in one hand and a flaming flag in the other, against a backdrop of misspelled graffiti.)

Just because someone claims to be an authentic source doesn't mean he is one. Islam doesn't have a clergy system, so no modern-day person is technically authorized to speak for the faith. The faith speaks only for itself, through its texts.

When somebody tells you, Islam says such and such, ask them to show you which page of the Qur'an, or which book of authentic *hadith* (teachings of the Prophet) says so. And because a word can be translated so many different ways, use only an authentic translation of the Qur'an — like the one by Yusuf Ali. Read about Islam from a website

like islamworld.net or muslimsforasafeamerica.com (disclaimer: that one's run by my brother, a journalist/civil rights lawyer).

If, in your reporting, you have trouble finding Muslims to interview in your community, or to speak in an official capacity, email me at reshmay@gmail.com. I'll help you find some.

After all that, if your editor still insists that you interview a raving lunatic Muslim, I invite you to stop by my house during the daily homework/dinner/"But he started it!" hour.

There is a thirst for honest, even writing about Islam.

What I would consider the most important stories of my career have been my essays about being Muslim. Immediately after 9/11, an op-ed piece that I wrote in *The Washington Post*, titled "I Am Not The Enemy," was circulated so widely that when people meet me, even a decade later, I'm often introduced as the person who wrote that piece.

I so want to put it on my resumé that Barry Manilow still has that article up on his website. When I wrote an essay about my *hajj*, the reader response from readers of every faith was so intense that the *Chicago Tribune* actually printed an update saying that the newspaper couldn't recall receiving more letters to the editor on any other story.

When I wrote an essay in *The Washington Post* about my experience with washing a body for an Islamic burial, it was selected for the "Best American Essays" book.

But I can't really write hard news about Islam, because my credibility appears limited. I may have 20 years of experience as a journalist, and an Ivy League degree in political science. I may have been a finalist

for a National Magazine Award, and been nominated for a Pulitzer by *The Washington Post*. But look up at my byline. It brands me with the Scarlet Letter M. There's no hiding the fact that this reporter is Muslim.

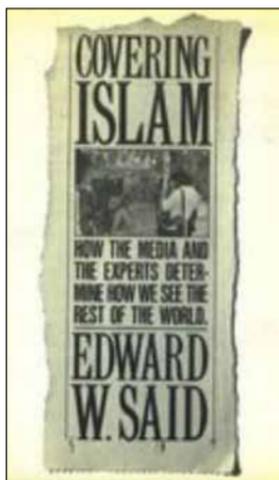
When I talk to my two sons about the image of Muslims and Islam, I remind them that yes, it's important that we speak up for our faith, and disseminate its truths. But it's no more important than speaking up for other marginalized groups. Because the real power comes when it's men, who speak up for women. And other races who speak up for blacks. And the rich, who speak up for the poor. When Muslims speak up for Islam, it feels like this little squeak; ineffective because, well, of course, they're just defending themselves.

So my 8-year-old has taken to writing essays (lots of them) about Martin Luther King and the perils of segregation. Not long ago, he made me and his brother sit down and listen to him recite one. In response, my 12-year-old delivered a speech about the benefits of home-schooling, for those who may discount it. I have to say, seeing my boys speaking up for — and taking the time to understand — the rights of a group that they don't belong to, that really makes me proud.

As you make your efforts to thoughtfully and evenly cover Islam, I leave in your hands the hard news reporting about my faith. My children would like it to be mentioned that their ability to ever have a television again rests in those very hands. And they, like me, have faith in you.



Islam on Main Street



IN the summer of 2011, as we were working on this project, I happened to be on a long drive from western Washington State to Portland, Oregon, where my son was playing in a high school soccer tournament. Bored with my kids' music, I flipped on NPR. For the next three hours, I listened with concern and consternation to the drama unfolding in Norway, where a bomb had rocked the capital, followed by reports of an almost simultaneous attack on a youth camp on a nearby island.

My concern was the result of the rapidly growing body count, which would ultimately reach close to 100. My consternation was prompted by the so-called experts who lined up to explain why Oslo would be the target of Islamist terrorism and the reporters who echoed them — even though there was no specific information Muslims were responsible.

Similar assumptions were seeded across the Internet as I scanned websites later in my hotel room.

“There is a specific jihadist connection here,” [reported Jennifer Rubin](#) on her *Washington Post* blog, Right Turn. “We don’t know if

al Qaeda was directly responsible for today's events, but in all likelihood the attack was launched by part of the jihadist hydra," [Thomas Joscelyn authoritatively opined](#) on the *Weekly Standard* website.

It was a classic example of the media echo-chamber; of pseudo-experts who have an agenda; and of the media following the general rush to judgment.

As we now know, the truth ended up being precisely the opposite of the early media narrative; the attacker was a right-wing, anti-Muslim Christian fanatic with a twisted agenda. But many of the same commentators who focus on the faith of Muslims accused of terrorism took a very different tack when a Christian was involved.

Three decades ago, Columbia University Professor Edward Said wrote about this phenomenon in his book *Covering Islam*:

[C]overing Islam is a one-sided activity that obscures what "we" do, and highlights instead what Muslims and Arabs by their very flawed nature are.

In other words, we make mistakes — Breivik certainly didn't represent all Christians or the Christian faith — but, according to Said, when Muslims are responsible for those same actions, reporters and academics act as if it's a reflection of something intrinsic in their DNA.

And it comes so naturally that we don't even realize we are doing it. In 2002, Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Muhammad told a gathering of heads of state of Islamic countries that, "The Europeans

killed six million Jews out of 12 million. But today, the Jews rule this world by proxy.” Around the same time, reports emerged that General William G. Boykin, an American who had led the search for a Muslim militia leader in Somalia, was giving speeches to fundamentalist Christian groups in the U.S. wearing his uniform (a violation of military code), telling them that he had been confident he would ultimately prevail over the Somali because, “I knew that my God was a real God, and his was an idol.”

Asked why Mahathir was dominating the headlines and Boykin was getting relatively little ink, the editorial director of CBSNews.com told a reporter, “General Boykin is a fluke ... Prime Minister Mahathir is no fluke.” What we do; what they are.

But the rush to judgment doesn't only take place on the right. In the hours after Nidal Malik Hasan, an American Muslim army psychiatrist, shot and killed dozens of people at Fort Hood in 2009, a host of Muslim spokespeople crowded the airwaves and spilled gallons of ink refuting the idea that his religion had anything to do with his actions.

Of course, this was a case of home-grown *jihad* by a misguided Muslim compelled to act by a radical American preacher in Yemen, who has since been assassinated in a U.S. drone strike.

The point is not that reporters, editors and talk show hosts must ignore expert speculation in such situations. Informed analysis is our stock-in-trade. The challenge is to ensure these are dueling opinions; that we are not just hearing one side; not just inserting quotes into

a preconceived narrative. And that we make sure our audiences are given the information they need to adequately weigh the credibility of the “experts.”

It is — obviously — our job to present all viewpoints, whether those represented by individuals and groups who warn of a Muslim threat inside the U.S. or what some have labeled Muslim “apologists” and/or “radicals” at the other end of the spectrum.

A quick Google search demonstrates the challenge of establishing the bona fides of potential “experts,” with allegations of radicalism and extremism on all sides. What’s a reporter to do?

Two suggestions:

- Turn to academics for guidance. Most (though certainly not all) scholars at leading universities at least try to take a balanced approach to the topic;
- Provide background when quoting non-academic “experts.”

Just as CNN has an obligation to tell viewers that many members of their so-called “best political team on television” are paid party hacks, reporters covering stories about Islam should make it clear when “talking heads” have ulterior motives. Anyone can create a website and call their organization a “think tank” or benevolent religious charity. It is up to reporters to provide the audience with context.

We’re getting a lot better at that.

When violence erupted in the Middle East over the posting online of a trailer for a supposed movie titled *Innocence of Muslims*,

news organizations were fairly quick to penetrate the fog of lies and show it was a deliberate work of political provocation by Egyptian Coptic Christians masquerading as Jews. After the Fort Hood massacre, many media outlets emphasized a warning from the base commander not to get caught up in speculation about Hasan's religion for fear of "heightening the backlash" against all Muslims in the military and many outlets quoted an imam who knew Hasan as saying, "These are not the actions of a good Muslim at all."

Likewise, most news outlets rightly framed the so-called Times Square bomber as a lone wolf who in no way represented the Pakistani community; reporters did a good job showing the "boycott" that forced the reality show *All-American Muslims* off the air was the work of a lone activist and weak-kneed sponsors; and Qur'an-burning pastor Terry Jones is largely being ignored these days.

In the aftermath of the Boston bombings, there were the predictable inflammatory headlines on some blogs that specialize in stirring the pot; mainstream media by and large did not immediately jump to the conclusion that Muslims were behind the outrage and, once the world learned that the bombers were Chechen Muslims, they did a fairly good job of keeping that fact in context.

No one said any of this was easy. Especially if you're a general assignment reporter in Columbus, Ohio, Shreveport, Louisiana, or any of a few hundred other towns and cities where Islam was not a word heard much in the newsroom.

But the Qur'an — or Koran if you follow the old AP style — has

taken its place alongside the Bible in Middle America and the Muslim community has become a beat like any other. Islam has arrived on Main Street. Just one more thing for an overworked reporter to learn about.

We hope this primer is a first step in helping you to follow in the footsteps of the journalists in this book who wrote about their own encounter with covering Islam, giving you a sense of how they learned about the Islamic religion and Muslim community and applied that to their reporting.

The rules of covering Islam are the rules of covering any subject: know who you are quoting and what axe they have to grind; arm yourself with the kind of information and resources that help ensure your reporting is fair and balanced; and avoid the shortcut of falling back on stereotypes and clichés.

There is one big difference between this story and many others: In the post-9/11 world, Islam is a potentially inflammatory subject; the last thing we as reporters should do is needlessly pour fuel on the fire because we haven't done our homework.

Lawrence Pintak
November 2013

Use of Language in Islam

BECAUSE Arabic has a different alphabet, words are often translated into English in a variety of ways; there is often no one correct English spelling. So too, Muslims may use different pronunciations for the same letters, creating even more confusion for the non-Arabic speaker. It helps to rely on a stylebook to keep some uniformity.

A good source is the religion stylebook found on the [ReligionLink](#) website. Also consider the *Associated Press Stylebook*.

It is a good idea to avoid the words tossed around by advocates debating Islam. Otherwise, you risk being caught up in words and terms that stereotype or give a point of view to your reporting. The term “Islamic fundamentalists,” for example, can have different meanings depending on its audience. For some, the meaning is negative but for conservative Muslims it can express their conviction that they are following the basics of the religion.

Since the Muslim world is so broad and diverse, you should also avoid broad generalizations and narrow your descriptions as much as possible. For more on the use of language in Islam, see “[Language Matters: Islam, a Definition](#)” from the *Chicago Tribune* newsblog “The Seeker” published online on November 4, 2010.

The following glossary includes many of the common terms you will encounter in covering Islam. Some provide links to further information.

A

Ahl al kitab — People of the book. A Koranic statement describes Jews and Christians as communities which follow religious texts revealed by God. Zoroastrians are sometimes included in this group.

Definition from [a book review](#) in *TIME Magazine*:

There's a phrase in the Quran, *ahl al-kitab*, — which roughly translates as “The People of the Book” or “people of an earlier revelation” — that refers to Jews and Christians as people, like Muslims, who belong to a faith that is rooted in a sacred text. Karen Armstrong, in her recent tome “Islam: A Short History,” quotes a line from the Quran that reads “Do not argue with the followers of an earlier revelation otherwise than in a most kindly manner ...” It's a gentle, non-confrontational passage that contrasts sharply with the uncompromising rhetoric many Westerners associate with fundamentalist Islam.

Alawite (Alawis) — A sect of Shia Islam located in Syria which reveres Ali, the son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad. Among their beliefs, Alawites emphasize the role of good and evil and how they are symbolized by light and darkness.

Here's a detailed definition from Malise Ruthven that appeared in the *New York Review of Books*:

The Alawis of Syria, who make up only 12 percent of its population, split from the main branch of Shi'ism more than a thousand years ago. Before the twentieth century they were usu-

ally referred to as Nusayris, after their eponymous founder Ibn Nusayr, who lived in Iraq during the ninth century. Taking refuge in the mountains above the port of Latakia, on the coastal strip between modern Lebanon and Turkey, they evolved a highly secretive syncretistic theology containing an amalgam of Neoplatonic, Gnostic, Christian, Muslim, and Zoroastrian elements. Their leading theologian, Abdullah al-Khasibi, who died in 957, proclaimed the divinity of Ali, the Prophet Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law, whom other Shiites revere but do not worship.

Like many Shiites influenced by ancient Gnostic teachings that predate Islam, they believe that the way to salvation and knowledge lies through a succession of divine emanations. Acknowledging a line of prophets or avatars beginning with Adam and culminating in Christ and Muhammad, they include several figures from classical antiquity in their list, such as Socrates, Plato, Galen, and some of the pre-Islamic Persian masters.

Nusayrism could be described as a folk religion that absorbed many of the spiritual and intellectual currents of late antiquity and early Islam, packaged into a body of teachings that placed its followers beyond the boundaries of orthodoxy. Mainstream Muslims, both Sunni and Shia, regarded them as *ghulta*, “exaggerators.”

Like other sectarian groups they protected their tradition by a strategy known as *taqiyya* — the right to hide one's true beliefs from outsiders in order to avoid persecution. *Taqiyya* makes a perfect qualification for membership in the *mukhabarat* — the ubiquitous intelligence/security apparatus that has dominated Syria's government for more than four decades.

This is [from the BBC](#):

Considered by some Muslims a heretic sect, this small Levantine minority have survived persecution and the Crusades to rise to the top and take over the Syrian establishment.

Alawite practices, which are said to include celebrating Christmas and the Zoroastrian new year, are little known even to most Muslims.

Alevi — The Alevis are a large religious minority in Turkey with roots in Central Asian Turkmen culture and pre-Islamic beliefs. They are close to Shiites, but follow different philosophies, rituals, and traditions. Their prayers take place in a *cem evi* (Turkish) and not in mosques. They do not prostrate themselves during prayers and both men and women take part. They do not make pilgrimage to Mecca. Their emphasis is on tolerance and community support. Within Muslim societies, their beliefs have caused them to face criticism and discrimination.

Here's an explanation from a [CNN blog](#) by Soner Cagaptay:

The Alevi faith, on the other hand, is a relatively unstructured interpretation of Islam, open to both genders and, historically, even to non-Muslims. Alevism is unique among Muslim sects, as it does not segregate men and women, even during prayers. The Alevi faith is also syncretic in nature, mixing Islam and Sufism, as well as harboring respect for some traditions of Christianity and the Turks' pre-Islamic religion, Shamanism. Unlike the Alawite faith, Alevism

lacks written traditions and does not emphasize religious practice.

Allah — God. In the Qur'an, Allah has 99 names that describe his attributes. These include king, protector, compeller, sustainer, exalter, the forgiving, judge. The Qur'an is His book and Muhammad was the messenger chosen by God to send His revelation.

This is [from the BBC](#):

Allah is [the name](#) Muslims use for the supreme and unique God, who created and rules everything.

The heart of faith for all Muslims is obedience to Allah's will.

- Allah is **eternal, omniscient, and omnipotent** ...
 - Allah has always existed and will always exist.
 - Allah knows everything that can be known.
 - Allah can do anything that can be done.
- Allah has no shape or form ...
 - Allah can't be seen.
 - Allah can't be heard.
 - Allah is neither male nor female.
- Allah is just ...
 - Allah rewards and punishes fairly.
 - But Allah is also merciful.
- A believer can approach Allah by [praying](#), and by [reciting the Qur'an](#).
- Muslims worship only Allah ...
 - because only Allah is worthy of worship

See also *TIME Magazine's* "[People of the Book](#)".

Amal — The word, meaning hope, is an acronym for the Lebanese Shiite resistance movement that expanded after Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982. Splinter groups later emerged as Hezbollah.

Ayatollah — A high-ranking Shiite religious leader.

B

Bin Laden — The son of a Yemeni father and Syrian mother, Osama Bin Laden grew up in a well-to-do family with a large construction business in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. He joined the *mujahedeen* in Afghanistan during their struggle with the Soviet Union and that led to the formation of al-Qaeda — the base. The group expanded its battle against Muslim-world leaders and the West, endorsing an austere and hardline view of Islam. It nurtured a web of similar extremist movements and championed violence rejected by many Muslim leaders.

Excerpt from a [profile of Osama Bin Laden](#) by *The New York Times* after his death in May 2011:

Long before, he had become a hero in much of the Islamic world, as much a myth as a man — what a longtime C.I.A. officer called “the North Star” of global terrorism. He had united disparate militant groups, from Egypt to the Philippines, under the banner of Al Qaeda and his ideal of a borderless brotherhood of radical Islam.

Terrorism before Bin Laden was often state-sponsored,

but he was a terrorist who had sponsored a state. From 1996 to 2001 he bought the protection of the Taliban, then the rulers of Afghanistan, and used the time and freedom to make Al Qaeda — which means “the base” in Arabic — into a multi-national enterprise for the export of terrorism.

After the Sept. 11 attacks, the names Al Qaeda and Bin Laden spread to every corner of the globe. Groups calling themselves Al Qaeda, or acting in the name of its cause, attacked American troops in Iraq, bombed tourist spots in Bali and blew up passenger trains in Spain.

This coverage from *The Guardian* (UK) includes [an obituary](#) and deals with reactions to Bin Laden’s death.

His life was one of extremes and of contradictions. Born to great wealth, he lived in relative poverty. A graduate of civil engineering, he assumed the mantle of a religious scholar. A gifted propagandist who had little real experience of battle, he projected himself as a *mujahid*, a holy warrior. A man who called for a return to the values and social systems of the seventh century as a means of restoring a just order in today’s world, he justified the use of advanced modern technology to kill thousands through a rigorous and anachronistic interpretation of Islamic law. One of the most notorious people on the planet, Bin Laden lived for years in obscurity, his public presence limited to intermittent appearances in videos on the internet. A man who professed to have sacrificed all for others and to care nothing for himself, he was fiercely conscious of posterity.

For more, see: *New York Times* background [articles on Osama Bin Laden](#).

For reactions, see: [Richard Adams's blog](#) in *The Guardian* (UK).

Burqa — A loose outer garment for women also known as a *chador*. It is typically black.

D

Deoband — A reformist movement that began in South Asia during British colonial rule with links to Sufism and the Tabligh Jamaat, which was formed in the 1920s in India.

Excerpt from a *New York Times* article providing background information about [Deobandi movement](#):

Founded in 1866, *Darul Uloom* has trained thousands of imams who, in turn, have founded *madrassas* throughout South Asia and Africa as part of the Deobandi Islamic Movement. Deobandis advocate a conservative form of Islam, and some Deobandi mosques in Pakistan and Afghanistan became radicalized in recent decades.

Many members of the Taliban call themselves Deobandis, even though the Indian leaders of *Darul Uloom* have strongly condemned them, rejected extremism and organized meetings of Islamic teachers to denounce terrorism. During India's independence movement, Deobandis supported Gandhi and later rejected joining a partitioned Pakistan.

Dhimmi — These are believers of other faiths, who should be protected and allowed to practice their religion under Islam.

From the [Saudi Gazette](#):

ISLAM does not compel people of other faiths to convert. It has given them complete freedom to retain their own faith and not to be forced to embrace Islam.

This freedom is documented in both the Qur'an and the prophetic teachings known as Sunnah. God addresses the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) in the Qur'an:

“And had your Lord willed, those on earth would have believed, all of them together. So, will you (O Muhammad SAW) then compel mankind, until they become Believers.” (Qur'an 10:99)

F

Fatah — The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was formed in 1964 to bring together various Palestinian groups. One of the PLO's major groups is the Palestinian Liberation Movement and its acronym in reverse in Arabic is Fatah.

Excerpt from [PBS background article](#) on Fatah and Hamas:

Fatah, which means “conquest” in Arabic, is a reverse acronym of *Harakat al-Tahrir al-Filistinya* (Palestinian Liberation Movement).

Fatah is a secularist group and was founded by Yasser Arafat and a handful of close comrades in the late 1950s to

promote the armed struggle to liberate all Palestine from Israeli control.

According to the BBC: “Arafat took over as chairman of the executive committee of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1969, a year that Fatah is reported to have carried out 2,432 guerrilla attacks on Israel.” Upon joining the PLO — a confederation of secular Palestinian parties — Fatah went from being a resistance group to a legitimate political party and the largest faction within the PLO.”

See also from the BBC: “[Profile: Fatah Palestinian Movement](#)” and “[Palestinian Rivals: Fatah & Hamas](#)”

Fatwa — A formal legal opinion by an Islamic scholar dealing with Islam. It is a response to a question not clearly detailed in Islamic scholarship. It is not a binding and its authority is linked to the training and place within the community of the scholar who has issued it.

Here is an explanation [from Juan Cole](#), a U.S. scholar on the Middle East:

But let me just add that it is important to understand what a fatwa is. In Islam the laity ask their clerics about how to follow Islamic law. The cleric replies with a considered opinion on the purport of the law, which is called a fatwa. In the Usuli school of Shiite Islam, deriving the law from the relevant sacred texts is achieved in part through the application to them of legal reasoning. That is, the law in some senses inheres in the mind of the jurispudent. If he reconsiders a case

and comes to a different, more mature conclusion later on, he is bound to reverse himself. His followers are bound to follow his most recent conclusions.

A high-ranking cleric appointed as a jurisconsult to the state, who gives official fatwas, is called a mufti. But any trained clerical jurisprudent can issue a fatwa. (The system is virtually identical in Judaism, where rabbis answer the questions of the faithful about *halakha* or Jewish law with *responsa*.)

So a *fatwa* is not like an American law that has to be published in the Congressional Record and in official law books. It is just the conclusion to which a cleric's reasoning leads him, and which he makes known, even in a letter.

Fiqh — The study of Islamic law.

G

Gamaa Islamiya —A hardline Egyptian Islamic group that rose up in the 1980s and was eventually suppressed by the government. It was led by Sheik Omar Abdul Rahman, who was later imprisoned in the U.S. for his role in the 1993 bombings in New York City. After the fall of the Mubarak government, the group surfaced and sought a role in Egypt's politics.

This is from the [Egyptian Independent](#), an English-language publication of *al Masry al Youm*, an Egyptian daily newspaper.

Leaders of *Gamaa Islamiya* (the Islamic Group) made

their first appearance in 20 years in a Monday meeting at a mosque in Assiut, Upper Egypt.

At the meeting, the group declared the resumption of their preaching activities after the ouster of president Hosni Mubarak, who resigned following two weeks of anti-regime protests that started on 25 January.

The group's most prominent leader, Assem Abdel Maged, declared that *Gamaa Islamiya* took part in and protected the revolt since its first day.

Gamaa Islamiya is one of Egypt's largest extremist organizations. It orchestrated armed attacks against the ruling regime during the nineties, but then formally renounced violence and reconsidered its excommunication rhetoric.

H

Hadith — These are the teachings and history of the Prophet Muhammad. They form a critical base of Islamic law and understanding. They do not come from the Qur'an, but rather were recorded later by associates, family members and others.

Hajj — The annual journey or pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca. Muslims are required to make this journey at least once if it is possible. *Umrah* refers to a journey to Mecca not during the annual gathering. It is not required for Muslims. Worshippers circle the Ka'bah during the *hajj* in Mecca (the Muslim calendar is different

from the Western calendar, so the *Hajj* occurs at a different time each year).

Excerpt from a 2009 article [about the hajj](#) in *TIME Magazine*:

This pilgrimage, known as the *Hajj*, is one of the Five Pillars of Islam (the others are the profession of Allah as the only God and Mohammed as his prophet; fasting during Ramadan; charitable giving and ritual prayer) by which every practicing Muslim must abide. This year [2009], the *Hajj* starts Nov. 25; it takes place annually between the 8th and 12th days of *Dhu-al-Hijjah*, the final month of the lunar Islamic calendar, a time when God's spirit is believed to be closest to earth.

The *Hajj* consists of a five-day excursion, required by all physically and financially able Muslims, to Mecca and the nearby holy sites of Arafat, Mina, and Muzdalifah. Once there, pilgrims perform a series of rituals to unify themselves with other believers, absolve themselves of their sins and pay tribute to God.

See also the BBC's "[Hajj: Pilgrimage to Mecca](#)", CNN's "[Mapping Faith: the Pilgrimage to Mecca](#)" (interactive map), and PBS's "[Virtual Hajj](#)"

Hamas — Its name stands for the Islamic Resistance Front and its acronym means zeal in Arabic. An outgrowth of the Muslim Brotherhood, it gained power during the first *intifada* or uprising by the Palestinians in the late 1980s and soon developed into a major political and social force in Gaza. Its victory in elections

in the Gaza Strip and West Bank in 2006 led to a showdown with PLO leaders in the West Bank and its breakaway rule of the Gaza Strip. Its support of armed militants, rejection of Israel's rule, and fundamentalist version of Islam have led to its isolation.

Excerpt from a [PBS background article](#) on Fatah and Hamas:

Hamas, which means 'zeal' in Arabic, is an acronym for Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiya (Islamic Resistance Movement).

Hamas is an Islamist militant group which began as the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, an Islamist organization based in Egypt.

Established by the late Sheikh Ahmed Yassin in 1987 after the first intifada (Palestinian uprising against Israel), Hamas follows the Brotherhood's two pronged approach of armed resistance and social welfare. Hamas is designated as a terrorist group by the United States government due to its long history of suicide bombings and attacks on Israel: since its first attack in 1993, more than 500 people have been killed by Hamas attacks.

In addition to its militancy, Hamas oversees an extensive network of social services in the Palestinian Territories, funding education, healthcare, soup kitchens, and mosques.

This is from a *New York Times* background [article about Hamas](#):

But the social programs that were the group's initial focus made the group widely popular among ordinary Palestinians — it created centers for health care, welfare, day

care, kindergartens and preschools along with programs for widows of suicide bombers. In January 2006, facing a divided Fatah, the party created by Yassir Arafat, Hamas won a decisive victory in parliamentary elections.

See also the BBC's "[Palestinian Rivals: Fatah & Hamas](#)", PBS's "[Fatah vs. Hamas](#)", and *The New York Times*'s "[Hamas Chronology](#)"

Hezbollah — The Party of God. A political movement born among Lebanese Shi'ites that has close ties to Iran.

Introduction to a background [article by the BBC](#):

Hezbollah — or the Party of God — is a powerful political and military organization in Lebanon made up mainly of Shia Muslims.

It emerged with financial backing from Iran in the early 1980s and began a struggle to drive Israeli troops from Lebanon.

Hostility to Israel has remained the party's defining platform since May 2000, when the last Israeli troops left Lebanon due in large part to the success of Hezbollah's military arm, the Islamic Resistance.

Hezbollah's popularity peaked in the 2000s, but took a massive dent among pro-Western Lebanese people when it was at the centre of a huge, destructive war with Israel following the capture of two Israeli soldiers in 2006.

See also PBS's [Documentary on Hezbollah](#), and the BBC's [Who Are Hezbollah?](#)

Hijab: This refers to the covering a woman wears on her head, or face or body. Literally, it refers to the act of veiling or secluding. It is said that the concept came from ancient Greece, Persia and Byzantium and was passed on to Arab society. Under the Ottomans, the *hijab* spread across the empire. But when Kemal Ataturk came to power as the head of the new Turkish republic in the early 20th century, the *hijab* was one of the many symbols of the old Ottoman society that he wanted set aside as a mark of the modernization of Turkish women. Spurred by increased piety, some women returned to wearing the *hijab* as it became more widely used across the Middle East.

The *Detroit Free Press* offered this explanation:

Why do some Arab women wear garments that cover their faces or heads? This is a religious practice, not a cultural practice. It is rooted in Islamic teachings about hijab, or modesty. While some say that veiling denigrates women, some women say that it liberates them. Covering is not universally observed by Muslim women and varies by region and class. Some Arab governments have, at times, banned or required veiling. In American families, a mother or daughter may cover her head while the other does not.

I

Ijtihad — The process of analysis and reason used by Islamic scholars to interpret Islamic law.

Ikhwan al Muslimin — (See Muslim Brotherhood.)

Imam — The leader of the local Muslim community.

Islam — This translates from Arabic as surrendering to God’s will.

An op-ed about the [definition of Islam](#) in the *Chicago Tribune* by Ahmed Rehab, executive director, Council of American-Islamic Relations — Chicago:

Islam is commonly translated into English, by both Muslims and non-Muslims, as simply “submission” (or “surrender”).

This is a simplistic translation that fails to convey the full meaning of the Arabic word.

There are namely two problems here.

First, “submission” and “surrender” in English contextualized usage imply a sense of coercion, a usurpation of one’s free will. When we say “surrender!” for example, it’s usually at gunpoint.

This contradicts a foundational criterion of Islam: freedom of will.

J

Jihad — Its meaning in Arabic is *struggle* or *effort*. The Qur’an calls on Muslims to struggle to improve their lives. It can also mean the military struggle in a battle linked to Islam. Fighters in a religious struggle are called *mujahedeen*. The Qur’an talks of a Greater Jihad, which refers to each individual’s struggle to follow

the teachings of Islam and to submit to the God's will. The Lesser Jihad refers to Muslims' struggle to defend Islam.

BBC website [explaining jihad](#)

From NPR: "[The War on the Word 'Jihad'](#)" (discusses definitions of *jihad*)

National Geographic News: "[What Does 'Jihad' Really Mean to Muslims?](#)" (discusses definitions of *jihad*)

Here is a [New York Times article](#) about a Muslim community group's effort to change the public's concept of *jihad*.

M

Madrassa — A school or college of Islamic learning.

Op-ed in *New York Times*: "[The Madrassa Myth](#)"

Masjid — A place of worship. A *jami* is a place used only for Friday prayers.

Muslim Brotherhood — *Ikhwan al Muslimin*. Founded in the late 1920s in Egypt by Hasan al Banna, the Brotherhood became a powerful political party based on a conservative view of Islam that has spread across the Muslim world and inspired similar organizations elsewhere in the region, such as Hamas in Palestine

The Brotherhood clashed violently with Egypt's political leaders, leading to its suppression until the Egyptian uprising in 2011. The Muslim Brotherhood-led government that replaced Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak after he was forced to step down was itself ousted by the military in 2013.

[Article from *The Guardian*](#) describing the Brotherhood's fall from power:

The Egyptian authorities have banned the [Muslim Brotherhood](#), sealing the marginalisation of the Islamist movement that was the country's most powerful political group until as recently as the July overthrow of [Mohamed Morsi](#).

A court on Monday ordered the freezing of the Brotherhood's assets and also banned its spin-off groups, state media reported.

In practice, the group had almost been forced underground already by the arrest this summer of thousands of its members — including most of its leaders — [and the killing of about 1,000 more](#).

It is a familiar predicament for the Brotherhood, which has been banned for most of its 85-year history and has successfully fought off every threat to its existence.

Originally banned under Gamal Abdel Nasser, it was tacitly tolerated under his successor, Anwar Sadat. During the last years of Hosni Mubarak's regime, several of its members were allowed to be elected to parliament in an independent capacity.

“I don’t think it will have an effect,” Ahmed Ragheb, a pro-Morsi activist close to several leading Brotherhood members, said of the new ban.

“People think the Brotherhood can be dissolved through governmental decisions. But it has existed for 85 years and survived far worse.”

Mullah — An Islamic leader, a term largely used in Asia. Mullah Omar became the leader of the Taliban, who ruled Afghanistan after defeating the Afghans who came to power with the fall of the Soviet occupation. Here’s an article from *Al Jazeera* that profiles Mullah Omar:

Kabul, Afghanistan — A decade of the US-led NATO war against the Afghan Taliban has done little to erode the influence of one of the movement’s most powerful symbols: the one-eyed, deeply secretive spiritual leader, Mullah Omar.

The killing of Osama bin Laden in May 2011 greatly undermined the global reach and reputation of al-Qaeda. Despite battlefield victories and a \$10m reward, the same success has eluded allied forces in their hunt for the shadowy leader of the Taliban.

Never seen and barely heard by most Afghans during his five-year rule, Omar was little more than an ever-increasing myth. The perpetuation of that myth today is considered by many a nagging failure of NATO and a unifying factor for the Taliban

The grinding corruption within the government of President Hamid Karzai has led Afghans in parts of the country to whisper his name and reputation for righteousness.

“No matter how much money we pour in, how hard I

try, these people will stand by Mullah Omar for his perceived justice,” one senior official in Kandahar recalled telling an American general.

“They say the Taliban cleaned up this place [Kandahar] from vice; from dog-fighting and bird-fighting and sodomy.”

The rise of Mullah Omar is shrouded in mystery, but legends about him are everywhere.

Q

Qadi — A judge who applies Islamic law.

Qiblah — This is the direction that Muslims face when making their prayers. They turn towards Mecca in Saudi Arabia.

R

Ramadan — The ninth month of the Muslim calendar when Muslims are called upon to fast during the daytime hours. It is a time of reflection.

Short description of Ramadan in [a New York Times article](#):

Coincidentally — the Muslim calendar shifts every year — it is also Ramadan, the month when the faithful believe that God gave the Qur’an to the Prophet Muhammad, a time of fasting, self-reflection and extra prayer, when being at Al Aksa Mosque here is even more important than usual. At night, when the fasting is over, the celebrating begins.

S

Salafi — Supporters of a movement that favors a more pious form of the religion, which they consider close to the practices of Islam at the time of the Prophet. Here is [a definition of Salafis](#) from a *New York Times* story:

The Salafi movement is inspired by the puritan Wahhabi school of Islam that dominates Saudi Arabia, whose grand mufti churned out a fatwa condemning the Arab uprisings as a Western conspiracy to destroy the Islamic world. But an array of philosophies exists under the Salafi umbrella, ranging from apolitical groups that merely proselytize on the benefits of being a good Muslim to Osama bin Laden's Al Qaeda. Ayman al-Zawahri, Al Qaeda's No. 2, is an Egyptian Salafist.

Salat — The prayers that Muslims carry out five times daily. From the BBC, [an explanation](#):

The prayer ritual, which is over 1400 years old, is repeated five times a day by hundreds of millions of people all round the world.

Carrying it out is not only highly spiritual, but connects each Muslim to all others around the world, and to all those who have uttered the same words and made the same movements at different times in Islamic history.

Sharia — Islamic law based upon the Qur'an, the *hadith* and the *Sunnah*, which are the habits and customs of the Prophet Muhammad.

Excerpt from [background article](#) about *sharia* law in *The Guardian* (UK):

Sharia law, which derives from the teachings of the Qur'an and from *Sunnah* (the practice of the prophet Mohammed), is implemented to varying degrees in different Islamic countries — from the beheadings of Saudi Arabia, to the relatively liberal social mores of Malaysia.

What is *sharia*?

The word *sharia* means “the path to a watering hole”. It denotes an Islamic way of life that is more than a system of criminal justice. *Sharia* is a religious code for living, in the same way that the Bible offers a moral system for Christians.

[Explanation of sharia](#) on the BBC website.

[From *The New York Times*](#) on *sharia*:

It (*Sharia*) is Islam's road map for living morally and achieving salvation. Drawing on the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* — the sayings and traditions of the prophet Muhammad — Islamic law reflects what scholars describe as the attempt, over centuries, to translate God's will into a system of required beliefs and actions.

In the United States, *Sharia*, like Jewish law, most commonly surfaces in court through divorce and custody proceedings or in commercial litigation. Often these cases involve contracts that failed to be resolved in a religious setting. *Sharia* can also figure in cases involving foreign laws, for example in tort claims against businesses in Muslim countries. It then falls

to the American judge to examine the religious issues at hand before making a ruling based on federal or state law.

Shii (Shia) — A group within Islam that grew out of a dispute over who should have become a leader of the Muslim world. They say that Ali ibn Abi Talib, the Prophet's closest male relative, should have assumed this position. Shiites account for about 15 percent of the world's Muslim population and they are centered in Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, and the Gulf.

[Excerpt from NPR article](#) “The Origins of the Shia—Sunni Split”:

It's not known precisely how many of the world's 1.3 billion Muslims are Shia. The Shia are a minority, comprising between 10 percent and 15 percent of the Muslim population — certainly fewer than 200 million, all told.

The Shia are concentrated in Iran, southern Iraq and southern Lebanon. But there are significant Shiite communities in Saudi Arabia and Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India as well.

[On the BBC website](#): “Quick Guide: Sunnis and Shias”

Sufi — A mystical tradition that developed within Islam and gained wide popularity for its emotional appeal. It has been both embraced and rejected by Muslim political and religious leaders.

[Excerpt from a BBC article](#):

Sufism has been widely practised in Pakistan for hun-

dreds of years — analysts saying it has a much bigger following than the hardline Taliban version of Islam.

Devotees perform singing and dancing and pray to saints who are honoured with numerous shrines.

Their beliefs are considered un-Islamic by hardliners, who have targeted their shrines several times.

[Explanation of Sufism](#) on the BBC website.

Sunni Islam — This is the largest sect in Islam.

[From the BBC website](#): “Quick Guide: Sunnis and Shias”:

Muslims are split into two main branches, the Sunnis and Shias. The split originates in a dispute soon after the death of the Prophet Muhammad over who should lead the Muslim community.

The great majority of Muslims are Sunnis — estimates suggest the figure is somewhere between 85% and 90%.

The two communities share fundamental beliefs — the “oneness” of Allah, that Muhammad was the last prophet, prayer, fasting and the pilgrimage to Mecca for example. But there are differences in doctrine, ritual, law, theology and religious organisation.

T

Tabligh — An Islamic movement born in India in the 1920s.

[From *The Guardian*](#) (UK):

The Tablighi Jamaat is the most successful of the many such groups to form after the Mutiny (known to India, where it comes from, as the Uprising) in the mid-19th century. Eighty million-strong today, the group shuns the harsh outside world, and creates an atmosphere of spirituality, solidarity and purpose among themselves that proves extremely compelling. Deobandi-inspired, adherents are interested only in reviving the faith of weaker Muslims, and thus helping to ensure either a passport to paradise, or the rule of Islam on earth, whichever comes soonest.

Taliban — The movement of students that emerged after the struggle against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan and eventually took control of Afghanistan with the Soviets' defeat. They embrace an extreme form of Islam, barring education for women and fostering a deep dislike for Western, non-Muslim society. Expelled from Afghanistan, they established a new base in Pakistan.

New York Times [background about the Taliban](#).

From *The New York Times*:

The Taliban, a Sunni Islamist group, ruled Afghanistan between 1996 and 2001 until they were ousted by the American-led invasion after the Sept. 11 attacks.

Based in the Pashtun region in the country's southeast, the group grew out of a student movement dedicated to purifying Afghanistan. Their rise was initially greeted with re-

lief by many Afghans weary of the corruption and brutality of the warlords who had fought for control in the years after the end of Soviet occupation. During their time in power, the Taliban sheltered Osama bin Laden and outlawed the education of women.

U

Ummah — The Muslim community or world.

W

Wahhabism — The school of thought begun by Mohammad ibn Abd al Wahhab in the late 18th century in Arabia. It preached against moral decline and presented an idealized form of early Islam without later interpretations of the religion. Embraced by Saudi Arabia's leaders, it advocates a puritan and austere lifestyle.

TIME Magazine [report about Wahhabism](#)

Z

Zakat — Muslims should set aside a share of their income and capital yearly to help those in need. It usually is about 2.5 percent.

Ayman al Zawahiri — Upon the death of Osama Bin Laden, Egyptian-born Ayman al Zawahiri became al-Qaeda's leader. Trained as a

physician, he became involved in extremist efforts in Egypt, and left the country the country after his release from prison in 1984. He merged his efforts with Bin Laden several years later.

Here is an excerpt from [a *New York Times* article](#) about his take-over of *al Qaeda*:

He now inherits a central Qaeda organization that is under intense pressure, even as its ideology has spread and spawned dangerous affiliates in Yemen, North Africa, Somalia and elsewhere. Central Intelligence Agency missile strikes from drone aircraft in Pakistan's tribal areas have killed many Qaeda operatives and have come close to hitting Mr. Zawahri himself. The strikes have made it far more difficult for the group to communicate, train and plan attacks.

Perhaps most significantly, the pro-democracy uprisings of the Arab Spring have left Al Qaeda as a bystander to history. It has been reduced to issuing belated statements of approval for what young people who largely reject the Qaeda credo have achieved. Mr. Mubarak's ouster, a central goal of Mr. Zawahiri's career, was carried out without him and by methods he had long denounced.



CHAPTER RESOURCES AND LINKS

PREFACE

Language

Arabic language online course (basic):

<http://i-cias.com/babel/arabic/index.htm>

International Center for Journalists (ICFJ) on use of language in covering Islam and Arabs:

<http://issuu.com/kijf/docs/fightingwordseenglish>

US coverage of Islam

Reporting on religion:

<http://www.religiondispatches.org/>

Meet a Muslim a commentary with advice for coverage, Minnesota Public Radio:

<http://minnesota.publicradio.org/display/web/2011/03/30/hamdan/>

Covering the diverse voices of Islam:

<http://www.islamopediaonline.com/video/islam-media-ali-asani-and-michael-paulson>

Writing about Arab and American Arabs:

<http://www.adc.org/index.php?id=248>

Avoiding stereotypes: “Stereotypes of Arabs, Middle Easterners and Muslims”:

<http://www.teachmideast.org/essays/26-stereotypes/38-stereotypes-of-arabs-middle-eastern>

Covering a Muslim minority:

<http://escholarship.org/uc/item/7n5515mx#page-1>

“Covering Muslims in America”, from the Poynter Institute:

<http://www.poynter.org/uncategorized/10848/covering-muslims-in-america/>

Dan Rather, on reporting on Muslims, video:

<http://vimeo.com/9580896>

South Asian Journalists Association “Advice for American journalists going to South Asia for the first time”:

<http://www.sajaforum.org/2008/05/request-advice.html>

Noreen Ahmad-Ullah, a *Chicago Tribune* reporter who has written about Muslims in the U.S. and overseas and on covering Islam, video:

<http://vimeo.com/9689120>

“Islam: Reporting in Context and With Complexity”. *Nieman Reports*, Vol. 61. No. 2. Summer 2007. Digital Newsbook.

http://www.rjionline.org/sites/default/files/nfr_islam.pdf

Muslims on TV and in the movies

Hollywood’s coverage of Arabs: Reel Bad Arabs: Press kit:

<http://www.reelbadarabs.org/press.html>

Muslims in the movies, *Newsweek*:

<http://www.newsweek.com/2010/10/29/redefining-muslim-roles-on-film.html>

Arabs and Muslims in movies:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/20/movies/in-a-better-world-and-other-films-on-islam.html>

The image of Muslims in the movies:

<http://www.newsweek.com/2010/10/29/redefining-muslim-roles-on-film.html>

Muhammad cartoon controversy

Muhammad cartoon incidents:

https://casestudies.jrn.columbia.edu/casestudy/www/layout/abstract.asp?case_id=66

Experts

Religion writers' guide to experts and sources and sources on Islam:

http://www.religionlink.com/tip_060807.php

Islamic Networks Group provides information and speakers on Islam for schools:

<http://www.ing.org/>

Home page for American Society for Muslim Advancement (ASMA):

<http://www.asmasociety.org/about/index.html>

Gallup Center for Muslim Studies:

<http://www.gallup.com/se/127907/Gallup-Center-Muslim-Studies.aspx>

Pew Research Center's home page:

<http://pewresearch.org/>

CHAPTER 1: ISLAM 101

Islam — history

Islam timeline from the birth of Muhammad to the modern day:

<http://www.thirteen.org/edonline/accessislam/timeline560.html>

Population growth in the Muslim world:

<http://www.pewforum.org/2009/10/07/mapping-the-global-muslim-population/>

“Crash Course in Islam” (two-minute primer):

<http://www.prx.org/series/30004--crash-course-in-islam>

The Difference, a short film about the similarities and differences between Christianity and Islam:

<http://www.linktv.org/onenation/films/view/355>

Beliefs and practices

The Call to Prayer:

<http://www.islamicity.com/multimedia/radio/ch90/>

Muslim prayer, their beliefs, the pilgrimage to Mecca and related topics (from *Religion & Ethics Newsweekly*):

<http://www.teachersdomain.org/special/awr09/awr09.trad.islam/>

Muslim prayer and practices (Channel Thirteen's “Access Islam”):

<http://www.thirteen.org/edonline/accessislam>

Virtual Hajj (PBS interactive website):

<http://www.pbs.org/muhammad/virtualhajj.shtml>

Ramadan (*Speaking of Faith* program):

<http://www.onbeing.org/program/revealing-ramadan/165>

Ten things to know about Islam:

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Electronic text of the Qur’an:

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Film Notes by Louisa Moffitt (SERMEISS) at the MESA Annual Meeting Teacher's Workshop 2004:

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World Values Survey Website:

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Pew Global Attitudes Project:

<http://pewglobal.org/>

Islamopedia: News and analysis related to contemporary Islamic thought:

<http://islamopediaonline.org/>

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Who are Muslims?

<http://www.teachmideast.org/essays/35-religion/56-who-are-muslims>

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The Shi’a homepage:

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<http://www.islamicity.com/education/culture/>

Calligraphy: Mamoun Sakkal has written four essays, which

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<http://www.sakkal.com/ArtArabicCalligraphy.html>

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Video of one of the most famous *qawwali* singers:

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Internet Medieval Sourcebook: primary sources from the Islamic world including literature and religious documents:

<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/sbook1d.asp>

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A timeline of Islamic dynasties:

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Middle East Institute's webpage on Islamic civilization:

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A Brief History of the Ottoman Empire from the University of Michigan:

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<http://www.businessweek.com/stories/2005-08-07/islamic-banks-a-novelty-no-longer>

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Council on Foreign Relations webpage about *sharia*:

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Whirling Dervishes Organization in the United States:

<http://www.whirlingdervishes.org/>

Video that explores the legacy of the Sufis:

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ORIAS History Through Literature class page on Islam:

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BBC video that examines historical relationship between science and Islam:

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Folk and popular Palestinian songs:

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<http://almashriq.hiof.no/lebanon/700/780/fairuz/legend/instruments.html>

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<https://ccrma.stanford.edu/~blackrse/islam.html>

The Pluralism Project at Harvard University website outlining music in Islam:

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[CHAPTER 4: ISLAM AND GLOBAL POLITICS](#)

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<http://www.politicalislam.com/>

Professor Charles Kurzman's webpage on Islamic political parties:

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Directory of Links on Political Islam, courtesy of Mount Holyoke College:

<http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/polislam.htm>

“Political Islam and the West” by Professor John Esposito of Georgetown:

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<http://aei.pitt.edu/11725/1/1510.pdf>

Article on Political Islam's influence in Pakistan:

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"The Future of Political Islam," by Graham Fuller:

<http://www.thedivineconspiracy.org/Z5215X.pdf>

"The Fortunes of Political Salafism in Gaza and Algeria," by Jared Reene and Scott Sanford:

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Newsweek article that distinguishes Islam from Islamist:

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History and definition of Islamism:

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Guardian article elaborating on Tablighi Jamaat:

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Islamic Institute summary of Dawa:

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Article about concept of Dawa:

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Access to audio files explaining Dawa:

<http://www.dawahusa.com/audio/yusufestes.shtml>

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BBC programs discussing the Iranian Revolution:

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Council on Foreign Relations story on reform and women's rights in Iran:

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PBS Frontline resources for studying Iran:

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Video discussing thirty years of Islamic rule in Iran:

<http://www.vimeo.com/4816844>

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Middle East internet resources:

<http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/indiv/mideast/cuvlm>

Database on Middle Eastern American Resources Online (MEARO), a joint project of the UCLA Middle Eastern American Program based at the Center for Near Eastern Studies and the Middle East and Middle Eastern American Center at the Graduate Center, City University of New York (CUNY):

<http://www.mearo.org/>

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Official website of the Muslim Brotherhood in English:

<http://www.ikhwanweb.com/>

BBC News profile of the Muslim Brotherhood:

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National Geographic video on the Muslim Brotherhood:

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Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada Report on Islamic Salvation Front in Algeria:

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Guardian report on Turkish military ousting Welfare Party:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/1998/jan/17/turkey>

United States report on Welfare Party in Turkey:

<http://www.refworld.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/rwmain?page=country&category=&publisher=USCIS&type=&coi=TUR&rid=&docid=3dec21784&skip=0>

BBC article confirming death of Turkey's first Islamist prime minister:

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English version of Turkey's Justice and Development Party website:

<http://www.akparti.org.tr/english>

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CHAPTER 11: DIGITAL ISLAM

Websites

“Digital Islam” is a term coined by researchers, such as Gary Bunt of the University of Wales Trinity Saint David’s, to refer to the influence of the Internet on both the *ummah*, or

community of Muslims, and the spread of radical ideology. Bunt's Virtually Islamic blog provides a variety of articles and links on the topic:

<http://garybunt.wix.com/virtuallyislamic>

Digital Islam online publication based in Europe:

<http://www.digitalislam.eu/>.

Islam and social media:

<http://muslimvoices.org/muslims-social-media/>

Islam and the Internet: 60 voices:

<http://www.islamintheageofnewmedia.com/>

The Future of Islam in the Age of New Media: the world's shortest conference on Islam ever to feature 60 different speakers:

<http://www.islamintheageofnewmedia.com/>

Religion Dispatches column on the potential for the Internet to improve Islamic relations with Western culture:

http://www.religiondispatches.org/archive/culture/990/virtual_islam%3A_peace%2C_love%2C_and_some_understanding

TabSir, a website providing insight on Islam and the Middle East. See also their link resources pages which will take you to various experts:

<http://www.tabsir.net/>

Terrorism

Several for-profit and nonprofit organizations watch terrorist

chat rooms, website, and listserv traffic 24 hours a day.

Examples include:

Terrorism Research Center

<http://www.terrorism.com>

Search for International Terrorist Entities (SITE) Institute,
the Project for the Research of Islamist Movements

<http://www.e-prism.org>

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Windows on Iran, a website discussing Iranian culture and politics:

<http://windowsoniran.wordpress.com/>

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Muslim charities and federal actions:

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<http://www.voanews.com/english/news/a-13-2009-06-17-voa64-68690942.html>

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Surveillance of Muslims in New York City (AP):

<http://www.ap.org/Index/AP-In-The-News/NYPD>

Washington Post story about Muslims concerned about a possible Congressional investigation into the American Muslim community. It shows sensitivity to the Muslim community, offers a balance of views and puts the event taking place into a bigger context:

www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/article/2011/01/23/AR2011012304448.html?wpisrc=nl_headline



ABOUT THE EDITORS

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

THIS book would not exist without the financial support of the **Social Science Research Council (SSRC)** and the **Carnegie Corporation of New York**. SSRC's Academia in the Public Sphere: Islamic Traditions and Muslim Societies in World Contexts initiative, funded by Carnegie, provided a series of grants that made possible both this book and the free online course on which it is based, which can be accessed at IslamforJournalists.org.

An enthusiastic “thank you” to **Thomas Asher**, program director of the Academia in the Public Sphere program, and **Hillary Wiesner**, then director of Carnegie's Islam Initiative. Thanks also to **Vartan Gregorian**, president of Carnegie Corporation of New York, whose concern about relations between the U.S. and the Muslim world led him to create the Islam Initiative and, not incidentally, write an incisive primer on the subject, *Islam: A Mosaic, not a Monolith*, which tops our suggested reading list.

Three of our graduate students at Washington State University, **Bill Hyden**, **Florian Buhl**, and **Priyanka Aich** played a valuable role though the process, checking facts, sourcing images, and generally providing the research backup so essential for a project of this type.

And a special thanks to **Roger Fidler**, program director for digital publishing at the [Donald W. Reynolds Journalism Institute](http://DonaldW.ReynoldsJournalismInstitute.org) at the Missouri School of Journalism in Columbia, who applied all of his experience and skills in transforming a poorly formatted draft into an impressive digital book.

Though they were not directly involved in this book, the distance education teams at Washington State University's Global Campus and the Poynter Institute's News University did yeoman's work in helping to create the online course on which the book is based. Thanks to **Rebecca Van de Vord**, **Stephen Garl** and their staff at WSU and to **Howard Finberg**, **Vicki Kreuger** and the rest of the team at Poynter.

And, of course, thanks to our contributors who let us — and you — benefit from their vast experience and expertise.



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SSRC-FUNDED ISLAM PROJECTS



PROJECTS funded by the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) along with profiles of academic experts supporting the projects.

[Islamopedia Online](#) is a project that aims to provide access to news and background information on Islam and Muslim countries that is largely unavailable in Western media due to language barriers or a lack of familiarity with the nations and people involved. The project is supported by the Center for Middle Eastern Studies and the Islamic Legal Studies Program at Harvard University.

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[Duke Islamic Studies Center Context and Connections Media Fellows Program](#)



[Islam in Latin America project](#) at Florida International University

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[Voices and Visions: Islam and Muslims in a Global Perspective at the Indiana University Center for the Study of Global Change.](#) The project

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[Additional information](#) about the Voices and Visions project at Indiana University.



[Islam, Muslims, and Journalism Education](#) (IMJAE) is a project of Michigan State University's Muslim Studies Program. IMJAE was created as a tool for providing journalists with a nuanced perspective on Islam, Muslims, and Muslim society.



[Iran Data Portal](#) is a project of Syracuse and Princeton universities that will result in the completion of an English and Persian-language website containing extensive social science information about Iran.



[Shari'a, Laws of War, and Post-Conflict Justice project](#) at Syracuse University is an effort to explore Islamic perspectives on transitional and post-conflict justice related to war crimes. The project website includes links to media content and additional study resources.

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[Muslims in Michigan](#) is an award-winning, five-part series that explores Muslim life in Michigan. The project is a partnership between the University of Michigan Center for Middle Eastern and North African Studies, Calvin College, and Michigan Radio.

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[Building Muslim Spaces in a Secular Society](#) is an ongoing project at the University of Pennsylvania. This project is an attempt to develop a better understanding of African Muslims in the United States through dialogue with citizens and academics.



[Inside Islam: Dialogues and Debates](#) is a collaboration between the Nine Area and International Studies Centers at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Wisconsin Public Radio. The primary aim of the Inside Islam project is to use new media as an interactive tool for enabling active communication between Muslims, non-Muslims, and academics.



[Islam Today: New Media and Youth Culture in the Middle East, South Asia, and Southeast Asia](#) is a multimedia project organized by the University of California-Berkeley's Centers for Middle Eastern Studies, South Asia Studies, and Southeast Asia Studies. The primary objective of the project is to examine how Muslim youth in Middle Eastern and South Asian countries use new media to explore their identities and address harmful stereotypes.



[Religion Dispatches](#) is an online religion publication based at Emory University. The publication will include content produced in an upcoming project, New Media and Scholars of Islam: A Partnership between Religious Dispatches and the American Academy of Religion. It is expected that this project will result in greater coverage of Islam through digital media formats associated with Religion Dispatches.



[Project on Middle East Political Science](#) (POMEPS) at George Washington University is designed to enhance the extensive Middle East Political Science field and its engagement with public policy, and the public sphere.



[Darwin and Evolution in the Muslim World](#) is a project supported by the Hampshire College Center for the Study of Science in Muslim Societies. The main goal of this project is to determine how Muslim societies perceive the role of science in the realm of their faith.



The [Chicago Project on Security and Terrorism](#) (CPOST) is an ongoing venture at the University of Chicago. The aim of this project is to advance the spread of knowledge and policy through publication of new scholarship in the field of terrorism. The CPOST website includes content such as videos and articles, along with a searchable database.



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