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HAMED ABDEL-SAMAD



ISLAMIC
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"As someone long skeptical about the notion of 'Islamofascism,' I concede that Hamed Abdel-Samad makes the strongest case yet for seeing Islamism as a derivative of fascism. The depth of his knowledge and the elegance of his argument make his book both a powerful read and an important analysis to understand the enemy."

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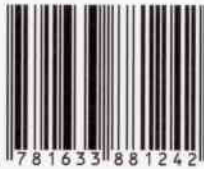
He is the Egyptian Salman Rushdie."

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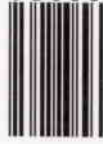


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ISLAMIC FASCISM



This polemic against Islamic extremism highlights the striking parallels between contemporary Islamism—as exemplified by ISIS, Boko Haram, al Qaeda, and others—and the twentieth-century fascism embodied by Hitler and Mussolini. Like those infamous European ideologies, Islamism today touts imperialist dreams of world domination, belief in its inherent superiority, contempt for the rest of humanity, and often a murderous agenda. Author Hamed Abdel-Samad, born and raised in Egypt, not only explains the historical connections between early twentieth-century fascist movements in Europe and extremist factions in Islam but also traces the fascist tendencies in mainstream Islam that have existed throughout its history.

Examining key individuals and episodes from centuries past, the book shows the influence of Islam's earliest exploits on current politics in the Islamic world. The author's incisive analysis exposes the fascist underpinnings of the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas, Hezbollah, the Shia regime in Iran, ISIS, Salafi and jihadist ideologies, and more.

Forcefully argued and well-researched, this book grew out of a lecture on Islamic

(continued on back flap)

fascism that the author gave in Cairo, which resulted in a call for his death by three prominent Egyptian clerics. This American edition contains two new chapters, one on the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq and one on the *Charlie Hebdo* massacre.

HAMED ABDEL-SAMAD

is a German Egyptian political scientist and author of several bestselling books in Germany. The son of a Sunni imam in the Egyptian city of Giza, Abdel-Samad formerly worked as a UNESCO consultant on Arab education and now ranks among Islam's fiercest critics. He was educated in English and French at Cairo's Ain Shams University, in politics at the German University of Augsburg, and in Japanese at Kwanseï Gakuin University in Japan; and he has lectured on Islam at the University of Erfurt and on Jewish and Islamic history at the University of Munich. Abdel-Samad has published five books—most recently the bestselling *Der Untergang der islamischen Welt* (The End of the Islamic World) and *Krieg oder Frieden: Die arabische Revolution und die Zukunft des Westens* (War or Peace: The Arab Revolution and the Future of the West)—and his columns appear regularly in German national newspapers such as *Die Zeit* and *Die Welt*, and in German national magazines such as *Cicero*. Additionally, he appears frequently as a guest on television and radio programs across the German-speaking world.

ISLAMIC FASCISM

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HAMED ABDEL-SAMAD

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*For the mother I love, who begged me not to write this book,
knowing I could never do what she asked.*

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INTRODUCTION

WANTED DEAD

I once saw a digitally altered image floating around Facebook—it showed a bearded man with a dark, penetrating gaze and raised placard bearing the words, “Behead those who call Islam violent.” I laughed myself sore at what then seemed an elegant—if bracing—statement of a stark reality, only the laughter caught in my throat months later when, without warning, I found my own portrait making the rounds, together with the words, “Wanted dead.”

A talk I gave in Cairo on June 4, 2013, discussing religious fascism in Egypt, had, it turned out, prompted this call for my murder. My argument in the talk had been that a fascist mentality had made its way into Islam long before the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood, that it was a product of the religion’s early history—early Islam had brought Arab religious pluralism to an end, demanding total obedience from its followers, brooking no dissenting opinion, and hungry for world domination. With this mindset being early Islam’s predominant feature, outweighing all other aspects of the faith, I argued we could talk about such a thing as “Islamofascism.”

Footage of the talk was posted online, its more provocative ideas prompting heated debate. Soon afterward, a group of Islamic scholars formed to refute my arguments on live TV. Citing endless passages from the Qur’an and life of the Prophet that supposedly

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proved Islam embraced pluralism and dissenting ideas, they then debated how best I ought to be punished for defaming it, quickly and unanimously agreeing that I should be killed—the disagreement was about how to arrange this and who ought to carry out my execution.

One scholar, an apparent moderate, said I should be offered the chance to show remorse and turn back to Islam, stressing I was to be killed only if I refused. Both the leader of terrorist group al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya and a professor from the esteemed al-Azhar University, meanwhile, demanded my immediate death, clarifying that since my talk defamed not just Islam but its prophet as well, remorse would be no good—nor would anyone need official dispensation to shoot me. In support of this view, the scholar from the university offered a story from Muhammad's life.

One day, the story goes, the Prophet found a woman put to death outside his mosque. When he asked those praying inside which of them had killed her, a blind man got to his feet and replied, "Messenger of God, it was I. This woman was my slave, and my two children by her are like precious pearls to me, but yesterday she insulted you, Messenger of God. I begged her not to slander you again, but she repeated her words. I slew her, unable to bear it." At this, Muhammad told the mosque's other congregants: "Bear witness, all of you: this woman's blood was justly spilled." Islamists regularly cite this story to legitimize the murder—without a trial or the right to a defense—of those who insult their prophet.

Before long, influential Egyptian Salafist (ultraconservative preacher who believes all Muslims should live and act exactly the same way as the Prophet Muhammad and his first community had lived fourteen hundred years ago) Abu Ishaq al-Heweny weighed

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in on my wrongdoings during a television appearance. (Al-Heweny sojourns frequently in Germany while instructing the country's Salafists, and one of his pupils is the convert Pierre Vogel.) From that moment on, he proclaimed, the principle of blood vengeance would be in effect between the two of us. These scholars move in such closed ideological circles that it never occurred to them that their interventions would only strengthen my arguments; worshipping their great leader Muhammad so devoutly, they feel moved to kill those who attack him—even if only verbally. They believe in killing others simply for disagreeing with them about things they consider sacrosanct. What does their worldview deserve to be called if not Islamic fascism?

Even under Egyptian law, the men who called for my death ought ordinarily to have been arrested immediately, but they were the very fundamentalists Mohamed Morsi—the country's then president—relied on to keep his opponents in a state of fear. The same professor from al-Azhar University who demanded I be put to death had called a few weeks earlier for the murder of opposition politician Mohamed ElBaradei, and no action was taken against him on that occasion, either.¹

Calls for my own death mounted online at frightening speed. In Tunisia, Islamists took advantage of the footage of my talk, exploiting it to smear the country's entire secular opposition, putting my words in all their critics' mouths to silence them. "Every righteous Muslim must rise up against those who equate Islam with fascism," an added caption read. The aftermath of that talk in Cairo forced me to enter hiding for several weeks. Since returning to Germany, I now live under police protection. Even in this country, fanatics long to see me dead. Germany's then-current

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foreign minister Guido Westerwelle condemned incitements to my murder at a press conference, calling on the Egyptian government to ensure my safety; yet only a week later, Morsi invited Assem Abdel Maged, one of the ringleaders in demands for my death, to a state function, embracing him while cameras looked on. Westerwelle would later speak of a “democratic fightback” when Egypt’s army deposed Morsi, and if democracy meant simply the holding of free elections, the former minister would have been right—but democracy means *far* more than that. Democracy is a political culture, a state of mind from which both Morsi and his Muslim Brotherhood were and still are light-years removed.

After his removal from power, in any case, warrants were issued for the arrest of two of the ringleaders who called for my death. All three television stations that had broadcast their incitement to murder were shut down on the army’s orders, and Assem Abdel Maged’s picture appeared—not entirely unironically—in state newspaper *Al-Ahram* beneath the word “Wanted.”²

I still receive death threats to this day. Pleasant as it would be if fanatics were only a threat while in power, beleaguered Islamists who see themselves as victims are both more dangerous and less predictable. My fears for myself are minimal, and I continue to write and give talks—I worry only for my Egyptian family members, who are now deluged with threats and abuse themselves.

Fanatics may be able to restrict my movements, but they can never garrote my ideas. The smear campaign mounted against me has swelled my readership in Egypt and in other Arab states, and I receive a great deal of support and solidarity in circles previously closed to me. People from Germany, Switzerland, and Austria have sent me e-mails expressing solidarity; some even give me

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refuge in their homes. Of all the messages from Egypt that reach me on Facebook, one raised my spirits especially. “My thanks go to the terrorists for introducing me to you and your ideas,” one man wrote. “Please keep at it!”

This book is one of my main attempts to do just that, even if it means pressing down further on the hornet’s nest my talks on Islam and fascism put my foot in. Indeed, the more violent reactions to it get, the more the masks of supposed Islamic moderates will slip, along with their pretense of a worldview compatible with democracy.

In *Islamic Fascism*, I compare Islamism’s totalitarian aspects with those of fascism. One chapter concentrates on the Muslim Brotherhood’s origins and evolution, highlighting its ideological and programmatic ties to European fascist movements of the 1920s and 1930s. As well as Islamists, those permanently stuck in Europe’s past may take umbrage at the comparison, perhaps offended by it; plenty of anti-Islamists and anti-fascists might also object, perceiving the comparison either to relativize history or to exaggerate today’s phenomenon. So it was in mid-1980s Germany when historian Ernst Nolte questioned the Holocaust’s uniqueness, calling its concentration camps and Final Solution a response to the Soviet Union’s gulags and exterminations.³

The philosopher Jürgen Habermas was one of those who lambasted Nolte’s comparison most harshly, calling it a “revisionist” attempt at restoring German “national consciousness” and shaking off the “amoralized past.”⁴ Most theories of totalitarianism are based on comparisons of Stalinism and Nazism. When it comes to these two totalitarian regimes’ power structures and mass exterminations, obvious overlaps exist—but comparison need not mean equation.

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If at first it seems less than straightforward to project the structures and core ideas of fascism—a young politics by comparison—onto a 1,400-year-old religion, it may help to note that movements for political Islam emerged nearly simultaneously with European fascism, building an outlook on both its cultural past and its political present accordingly. Neither in Italy nor in Germany did fascism emerge in a vacuum, its roots stretching back hundreds of years, as do Islamism's roots in Islam. One chapter of this book focuses on Islam's historic origins, exploring the influence this early history still exerts today on politics in the Islamic world and focusing on key thinkers from Islam's history, as well as periods when they found especially sympathetic ears.

Other chapters address the concept of jihad, its relationship with Islamic sexual morality, terrorism, Shiite fascism, and Islamism within Europe—but the first examines political Islam's first principles, all of them reminiscent of fascism in its earliest form.

CHAPTER 1

AN ODD COUPLE? FASCISM AND ISLAMISM IN RECENT HISTORY

Fascism, in some ways, is a political religion. Its followers believe they possess absolute truth; a charismatic, infallible leader stands atop its hierarchy, armed with a divine mission to unify the nation and crush its foes. Fascism's ideology corrupts its followers with hatred and resentment, partitioning the world into friends and enemies and threatening those who oppose it with retributions. It opposes modernism, Enlightenment values, Marxism, and Jews, while glorifying militarism and self-sacrifice—even martyrdom.

Modern Islamism shares all these qualities, having emerged simultaneously with fascism in the 1920s. Islamism and fascism alike emerged from feelings of abject subjugation, united by empire-building goals with world domination, a manifest virtue, and their enemies' annihilation a prerequisite. One movement believes in Aryan racial supremacy, the other in Muslim moral supremacy over the vast, unbelieving bulk of humanity.

When Benito Mussolini founded his fascist movement in Italy, he dreamed of capturing the Roman Empire's glory days. Only a few years after Mussolini's rise, Hassan al-Banna founded the Muslim Brotherhood with similar yearnings, also invoking

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the memory of a glorious bygone era of Islam. Tunisian-French author Abdelwahab Meddeb considers the Islamic world's central problem to be its own anxiety about no longer acting as the leading geopolitical power it was in the Middle Ages. He sees the dissonance between a proud past and the harsh present reality as a major source of anti-Western resentment. In Meddeb's view, it is a chronic sickness born from feelings of being cheated by history and the world. Together with an idealized past, this sickness constitutes one of Islamic fascism's driving forces.

THE PILLARS OF NASCENT FASCISM

In his book *Five Moral Pieces*, Italian philosopher, semiotician, and man of letters Umberto Eco lists fourteen distinct features of "ur-fascism," or fascism in its earliest form.¹ Among them is the "cult of tradition," decreeing truth to have been revealed in times past from on high, denying the possibility of intellectual advances today. Truth can be found, the cult of tradition dictates, only in strict adherence to revelation—certainly not, at any rate, by means of independent thought or study.

The same cult of tradition is a central part of Islamic thought, where the Qur'an, in its inviolability, is said to contain all there is to know. Political Islam considers its mission divine, a call to be answered in every time and place, regardless of reality. Salafists and jihadists alike demonize those who interpret Islamic texts in keeping with the times, the word of God not being humanity's to reconstrue: to them, it matters not a bit that a Muslim who takes scripture literally is likely to struggle making his way in an ever-changing modern world ambivalent to him. To Islamists, moder-

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nity is simply a sign of how far people can stray from the true faith; for Eco, meanwhile, rejection of modernity and the Enlightenment—tied to a tendency toward irrationalism—is another feature of fledgling fascism; others include rejection of critical reasoning, xenophobia, sexism, and machismo.

Fascism, Eco writes, feeds on people's obsessive belief that "others" have drawn plans against them, a persecution complex accompanied by a fixed sense of having been humiliatingly short-changed and a subsequent thirst for retribution. Fascism's followers live to fight more than they fight to live, the "struggle" being an end rather than a means. Word for word, the same applies to the Islamic concept of jihad, functioning not as a means of self-defense but as a duty unto God for all eternity. Come the end of days, the idea goes, the new world order will witness its enemies—humanity's unbelievers—convert or die.

To outline a further parallel, fascism and Islamism alike are maladies of "belated nations," societies fondly recalling glorious histories while in a process of decay. Before broadening its horizons in other European states, fascism first asserted itself in Italy. Why Italy, of all places? At the time, the country was in the midst of an incomplete unification process, political parties were mauling each other, feelings of being shortchanged in the Paris Peace Treaties ran high, the economy was depressed, and fears of a Bolshevik revolution were looming. To top it all, Italy was devoutly Catholic, with its influential church's core ideas including principles like honor, hierarchy, unity, charismatic leadership, and absolute truth—elements that would also find their way into fascism.

In the nationalist surge at the turn of the nineteenth century, nationalist and fascist movements did emerge in countries like

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England and France, which had long histories of national unity under a single state to look back on. In the political sphere, however, they achieved only marginal relevance. Historian Ernst Nolte views Action Française, the militant Catholic movement founded in France in 1898, as a forerunner to fascist movements that would later emerge in Italy and Germany. It hoped to put a stop to modernism in the Catholic Church, returning to a conservative Christian social order, yet never managed to garner mass support, losing for good what relevance it had when the Nazi Wehrmacht occupied France.

Three years after the hammer blow of 1929's Wall Street crash, Oswald Mosley founded the Britain Union of Fascists. According to its own figures, the party boasted fifty thousand members,² with Mosley touring Italy to study fascism, later commissioning a black party uniform to match that of Adolf Hitler's SS. In the wake of the Night of the Long Knives, however, and certainly during the Second World War, his movement hemorrhaged support.

Only in the belated German and Italian nations did fascism take hold, its supporters seizing the reins of power and leading the public astray. Italian fascism could be seen as the endpoint of the Italian unification process Giuseppe Mazzini and Giuseppe Garibaldi had begun in the nineteenth century. The Italian word *fascio* stems from the Latin *fascēs*, meaning "bunch" or "bundle," referring originally to the bundle of rods carried in front of Roman emperors, first by imperial bodyguards and later by civil servants and officials. A symbol of power, it served both as a sign of unity and a potential instrument of corporal punishment for dissenters and criminals. When Mussolini founded his first association, Fasci di Combattimento, in 1919, he was

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invoking memories of the Roman Empire as a world power—not least because he hoped to rebuild it.

German fascism also emerged in a period of deterioration. To name only a handful of factors, economic fragility, established parties' weakness, and the Treaty—or, in Germany, Travesty—of Versailles offered National Socialism a fertile breeding ground. The movement seemed to promise that the Wilhelmine empire's scotched dream of a “place in the sun” for Germany could be revived, the nation born again to strike back at powers that had debased it in the recent past, its ignominious defeat in the First World War forgotten. Crudely mixed, both impotence and the dream of omnipotence created the perfect climate for the Nazis' rise to power.

Islamists exhibit just the same mixture of beliefs in their own impotence and omnipotence. Having come upon the world stage only six centuries later than Christianity, Islam could be called a belated religion, still in its own middle ages today: using Islamic dating, in fact, the year 1436 matches 2015. Most Muslim countries could themselves be called belated nations in the same vein as 1920s Germany or Italy, unable since the Ottoman Empire's fall (and later the end of colonial rule) to decide between the modern nation-state and the pull of ancient tribal structures and theocracy, leaving most Islamic states at a standstill for decades, governed under a contradictory blend of these regimes. In states with (military) dictatorships or those that dare to cautiously approximate modernity, Islamists come to form a political alternative.

The twentieth century witnessed a violent backlash against modernity and the values of the Enlightenment: after Bolshevism and fascism, both historian Ernst Nolte and philosopher Ernest

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Gellner view Islamism as a third antimodernist movement. All three have certainly availed themselves of modernity's technological innovations, yet they vehemently resist the cornerstones of the Enlightenment. Reason, personal liberty, freedom of thought, individuality, human rights, and human bodily autonomy, as well as freedom of expression and the press—all three movements view these as threats.

In particular, these movements have always perceived the transition from rural to urban social organization to spell the end of communities based around shared backgrounds and/or ideology, a mainstay of all totalitarian regimes. The near-mystical exaltation of the rural sphere is often the root of efforts to preserve these communities, and an anti-urban discourse distinguishes all three movements. For the Bolsheviks, the city was the site of the proletariat's exploitation; for the Nazis, Berlin symbolized the downfall of traditional morals in the roaring twenties; and for Islamists, too, the city is a place of sin and moral decline.

Wherever fascists, communists, and Islamists have taken power throughout their histories, societies have become open-air prisons whose inmates—their own citizens—have been monitored twenty-four hours a day. Pluralism has been and still is regarded as a threat, while societal consensus is artificially enforced through violence and intimidation. There is one and only one true ideology, with dissidents branded turncoats and traitors at best, eliminated outright at worst.

To stifle internal criticism, totalitarians stoke fear, constructing a scenario of imminent danger, the country and its people struggling against some real or imagined foe. The Nazis went about this with a degree of creativity, the German people threatened first

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by their country's Jews and communists, then later by the external threat of the Allied forces. The Soviet Union's external enemies also changed several times during its history, led at first by the Nazis and then by the democratic West. Dissidents inside the communist bloc served as the enemy within, supposedly collaborating with the West to undermine solidarity across society.

Islamists, by contrast, have always spoken of the same three foes: the West on the other side of the world, Israel close to home, and heretics, reformists, and secular thinkers and politicians the enemy within, deemed universally to act as an extension of the West. Wherever Islamic fascism has taken hold, as it has in Iran, Sudan, Nigeria, Somalia, and Gaza, brutal dictatorships have emerged, refusing to this day to relinquish their grip on power; wherever Islamists have been ousted from government, they and their supporters have shape-shifted into terrorists, inflicting acts of devastating violence on their own countries, as in Algeria, Afghanistan, Mali, and Libya—a fate that now threatens Egypt and Syria as well.

Yet for a broad swathe of the populace in Muslim countries, political Islam constitutes a beacon of hope. One factor among others is that neither the public nor the political elite in the relevant countries are prepared to admit their own failure—specifically, their inability to date to forge their own alternative to Western democracy. Above all, wounded pride has hamstrung all reappraisal of the Arab world's history and fruitful relations with the West, with many Arab states settling firmly into their own victim mentality, encouraging collective cultivation of anti-Western hatred. Both secular dictatorships and their Islamist rivals have fed on this hatred, a lost, frustrated, and above all angry generation resulting.

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Some find a means of venting their anger in rebellion against the ruling elite, while others find shelter and solace among Islamists.

It was in this manner that the once-peaceful mass movement behind the Arab Spring dissolved into infighting between two equally implacable blocs, a confrontation I choose to describe as an internal clash of civilizations—not the much-debated clash of the West with the Islamic world, but an intra-Arabian, intra-Islamic power struggle. The Islamic world can be viewed as an onion-layered multiple dictatorship: the dictatorship of political dynasties like the Mubarak, Gaddafi, Hussein, Ben Ali, and Assad families forms its first layer; the dictatorship of the military, the next; after that, the dictatorship of religion, which determines how children are raised and educated; and finally, the dictatorship of society, which impacts life within families through archaic gender roles.

Each onion layer is a high wall separating the Islamic world from the rest of the globe, supposedly so as to safeguard its identity. Young people demonstrating on the Arab world's streets today have managed to peel one layer away, only to find themselves confronted with the next. It may be that in the end, only the onion's core—religion—remains. It is still debatable, if so, whether the courage of youth will suffice, rocking it from its position of power. Should they succeed, what next occurs to them will be that the onion itself was only ever a product of fear—and that beneath all its multiple layers, there was *never* anything worth guarding. Only then can we refer to a “revolution”—and until then, Islam's ancient totalitarian features will go on making their mark, spreading even to areas where religion formerly played only a minor role.

CHAPTER 2

REFORMISTS OR FASCIST ISLAMISTS? THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD IN EGYPT

The Muslim Brotherhood, one of the Middle East's most influential Sunnite groups, is sometimes presented by experts on Islam as a "reformist social movement" that renounced violence in its distant past. These are the same experts who fawn over "moderate Islamism," claiming it to be compatible with democracy. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Turkey's incumbent president, is mentioned constantly in conjunction with this so-called moderate Islamism—so are Rachid al-Ghannushi and his Ennahda party in Tunisia, and Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood.

When all three parties were exposed as antidemocratic and corrupt, these experts steadfastly refused to relinquish their faith that somewhere in the world, moderate Islamism definitely did exist—ignoring that Islamists, whatever their colors and camouflage, only enter politics with one goal: enforcement of an Islamic social order under sharia law, not precluding world domination in the long term.

Deep down, Islamists despise democracy and consider it little more than a route to power. Having witnessed his mentor Necmettin Erbakan fail to establish theocracy by bypassing Turkey's insti-

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tutions, Erdoğan chose to infiltrate them instead, styling himself early in his career as a secular, pro-Western candidate desperate to fight corruption and reform Turkey's economy. Only a few years after being elected head of state—once his country's institutions had been subverted from within, its military neutralized—did he reveal authoritarian, imperialist, and anti-Western views.

When a corruption scandal rocked Erdoğan's government in December 2013, Minister for Economic Affairs Zafer Çağlayan had only conspiracy theories to offer, describing a "squalid plot against the government, the party, and Turkey itself."¹ Foreign intelligence agencies were, Çağlayan claimed, behind the scandal. Diverting attention reflexively from real-world problems with conspiracy theories of this kind is, in itself, a feature of developing fascism.

The Muslim Brotherhood's history includes several attempts to take power in Egypt by force, at one point deeming democratic elections blasphemous since sovereignty lay with God rather than with the people. Brute force never allowed them to achieve their goals, however, and so the group's stance on elections—if not democracy itself—changed over time. The Brotherhood won Egypt's elections in 2012, yet failed miserably after only a year in government. Once again, the government blamed Islam's enemies at home and abroad instead of holding itself to account.

In December 2013, key figures from the Muslim Brotherhood finally stood trial, accused of ordering demonstrators' deaths. Its methods, the same ones fascism historically employed, are now all too familiar—critics, dissidents, and apostates were considered one more enemy within to be eliminated.

The Brotherhood's trajectory has been a fascist one ever since

REFORMISTS OR FASCIST ISLAMISTS?

its founding in 1928, and like any fascist movement it trades in two currencies: rage and blood. Throughout the group's eighty-eight-year existence, its members have never come up with any real plans for Egypt's future, nor any answers to the country's problems or those of any other Muslim state—yet they remain determined to rule over the countries in question. Those willing to work alongside the Brotherhood are required to adopt its slogan, “Allah is our objective; the Qur'an is our constitution; the Prophet is our leader; jihad is our way; death for Allah's sake is our highest goal.”

Whatever supposedly moderate form the group's politics take, these five pillars are enough to unmask it as a fascist organization. With its members' conviction that all those not with them are their enemies, the Muslim Brotherhood can also be seen as founders of Islamist terrorism, al-Qaeda being one of the group's immediate descendants. The Brotherhood's entire history is a product of the same mentality as National Socialism and its horrific results—a mind-set whose roots stretch far back into history.

The First World War's conclusion spelled the end for many superpowers. The royal houses of Habsburg-Lorraine and Russia were beaten, Germany and Austria-Hungary's imperialist dreams were in ruin, Russia's czar and his family had been murdered, and the country's monarchy was supplanted with communist revolutionaries. The long-beleaguered Ottoman Empire finally fell in 1924; the caliphate that had held countless Islamic states and peoples together for four centuries, its governmental system legitimized by Islam, died with it.

In all these fallen empires, new regimes that held distinctive ideologies followed hot on monarchism's heels. Fascism spread in Italy and Germany, the latter's National Socialists taking power

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after the historical interlude of the Weimar Republic, while communism became Russia's new religion. Following the Ottoman Empire's collapse, people in the Islamic world found themselves hovering like lost children, orphaned and unsure where to turn.

Three ideologies competed for their approval—Islamism, nationalism, and pan-Arabism. The modern democratic nation-state had garnered a bad reputation, and most Muslim countries at the time were still under British or French colonial rule, their people feeling exploited and oppressed. Communism, by contrast, carried favor quickly with intellectuals, most notably in Syria and Egypt, yet remained off the table for the Muslim majority due to its wholesale rejection of religion.

During this tense period of reorientation, two groups emerged independently of one another that aimed to restore the Islamic caliphate. In India, the scholar Abul Ala Maududi founded a movement in 1924 that would also revive jihadist ideology. Maududi wished first to shake off the yoke of British rule and then unite the *ummah*, or worldwide Muslim community. "Come out and join the struggle," Maududi declared, calling its members to an armed conflict.² "Eliminate all those who reject God. . . . If you accept the truth of Islam, all that remains for you to do is to put all your strength into establishing Islamic rule on Earth." Maududi's ideas spread rapidly, first in India and later in Pakistan and Afghanistan, his understanding of Islam serving as the main basis of the Taliban's ideology today.

Four years later, in 1928, the Muslim Brotherhood formed in the provincial city of Ismaïlia, located on the Suez Canal. Hassan al-Banna, then a twenty-two-year-old teacher of Arabic, established two goals for his new movement. First, Islamic society was

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to be cleansed of all things un-Islamic; second, the caliphate was to be restored. His philosophy caught on quickly in Syria and Egypt, and today the group boasts representatives in more than seventy states worldwide, with Muslim Brotherhoods active both politically and financially in Europe and the United States.

Neither Maududi's nor al-Banna's group took power anywhere early on, but numerous militant organizations that have been responsible in recent decades for countless terror attacks in the Islamic world, Asia, Europe, and the United States spawned from them. Globalization brought both movements to each other's attention, with children and grandchildren of al-Banna and Maududi meeting in 1980s Afghanistan to fight Russia with Saudi money and Western bullets. Rather than laying down their guns when Soviet rule ended in Afghanistan, they founded a movement devoted to fulfilling both men's dreams through long-term jihad. Today, that group is known as al-Qaeda.

I digress—at this point, we might do well to examine the Muslim Brotherhood's relationship with National Socialism.

THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD AND THE NAZIS: A LOVE AFFAIR AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

In 1946, Hassan al-Banna delivered a eulogy for Amin al-Husseini, grand mufti of Jerusalem. Wanted as a war criminal and Nazi collaborator after the Second World War, al-Husseini had sought asylum in Egypt after a brief spell in a French prison, finding refuge with al-Banna's Muslim Brotherhood.

“The Mufti is worth a whole nation to me,” al-Banna declared in his speech, “for the Mufti is Palestine and Palestine its Mufti. O

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Amin, what a great, indomitable, incredible man you truly were. Hitler and Mussolini's defeat did not rile you. What a hero you were—what a miracle of a man. Pray, what could Arab youth ever do—what could cabinet ministers, the wealthy, the princes of Palestine, Syria, Iraq, Tunisia, Morocco, and Tripoli ever do—to deserve a hero like you, who challenged an empire, battling Zionism with Hitler's help? Hitler and Germany may be no more, but Amin al-Husseini will fight on.”³

Al-Banna and al-Husseini had been friends long before the latter's flight from Germany, where al-Husseini resided as Hitler's personal guest during the war, following a failed pro-German putsch in Iran in 1941. A 1927 letter in which al-Banna (still a young teacher at the time) informs al-Husseini of his intent to found a “Muslim brotherhood” is proof enough of correspondence between the two much earlier.⁴ Al-Husseini reacted excitedly, giving this plan his blessing, and an old photo from the Muslim Brotherhood's archives shows the two getting along famously.⁵

Amin al-Husseini's relationship with the Nazi regime is thoroughly documented, with the grand mufti debating the “Final Solution to the Jewish question” with Ministers Joachim von Ribbentrop and Adolf Eichmann and hoping to solicit Hitler's support for an Arab state in Palestine modeled on Nazi Germany—the list of associations goes on. Yet there are precious few signs al-Banna had friends in such places at the time. While British foreign ministry documents attest to correspondence between Nazi intelligence and members of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt (who planned to weaken Britain's grip on North Africa during the Second World War), the extent of this collaboration remains unclear.⁶

What can be proven beyond doubt is that Hassan al-Banna

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admired both Mussolini and Hitler, viewing them as effective leaders who led their countries into a new era. Whenever he mentioned either, he honored them with their Italian and German titles, “Il Duce” and “der Führer.”⁷ Al-Banna, for his own part, pronounced himself not just an imam or qaid (“commander”), as Arab religious and political leaders most commonly did, but a “murshid” or “guide.” Later, Ayatollah Khomeini would adopt the same title.

In one of his many articles, al-Banna appears besotted with a speech of Mussolini’s from 1935 that committed Italy to everlasting war. “Every Italian man between eight and fifty-five must be gripped by a militarist spirit,” the dictator had said atop a tank.⁸ “Militarism is a new idea, something no one has succeeded in realizing throughout human history, and there is reason enough why such an idea is hard for other peoples to enforce. On historical and moral grounds, no people except Italy’s is well placed to become a nation of soldiers.”

Al-Banna goes on to list reasons past nations had fallen, taking the Roman Empire as one example. “Early empires perished,” he writes, “on striving for prosperity and comfort, neglecting the spirit of conflict, for close to them other nations came on the scene that were less civilized, but consequently stronger and more battle-ready.”⁹

The most interesting and most telling point is that al-Banna corrects Mussolini, pointing out the idea of society’s total militarization had begun not under fascism but thirteen centuries beforehand, early on in Islamic history. Islam, al-Banna argues, revered the same spirit of militarism as Mussolini, seeking to implant it in every Muslim’s soul. “There is barely a surah in the Qur’an in which the Muslim is not summoned to show courage, endurance and militance, pursuing jihad in the name of God.”¹⁰

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In his conclusion, al-Banna cited numerous verses from the Qur'an and statements of the Prophet to prove Islam a militarist religion—with one small but decisive difference from fascism. Whereas the goals fascists pursue through armed conflict are ultimately worldly ones, he writes, “Islam is geared toward preserving God’s legacy on earth.”¹¹

The notion of armed conflict was enshrined in al-Banna’s own movement from day one, as is clear—if on no other grounds—from the emblem he personally designed: two crossed swords beneath a Qur'an, the opening words of one verse—“And prepare”—underneath both. The verse, from Surah 8, reads, “And prepare against them whatever you are able of power and of steeds of war by which you may terrify the enemy of Allah and your enemy and others besides them whom you do not know [but] whom Allah knows. And whatever you spend in the cause of Allah will be fully repaid to you, and you will not be wronged.”

Accounts of this emblem’s derivation are contradictory, some even claiming it as an Islamic version of the swastika, yet the opening lines of the Brotherhood’s first manifesto are indisputable, a clear call to armed conflict still in use today, only its context changing with the times. “Allah is our objective; the Qur'an is our constitution; the Prophet is our leader; jihad is our way; death for Allah’s sake is our highest goal.”

Originally, this call to arms referred to British colonial rule as well as the forces of democracy in Egypt, which installed a secular constitution in 1922. While Egypt had achieved independence on paper earlier that year, it remained a British mandate. A group of Western-educated Egyptian lawyers and politicians had passed a constitution far too liberal and democratic for the Muslim Brother-

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hood's liking—certainly one more progressive by far than any that followed in Egypt, as it protected among other things equal rights for men and women and unequivocal freedom of the press, of thought, and of belief.

One member of the commission behind this constitution was Youssef Qattawi, a Jew who would serve later as the country's minister for finance and found the Arab world's first bank. At the time of the Brotherhood's founding, Wissa Wassef—a Copt—similarly presided over Egypt's parliament. The Muslim Brotherhood opposed the right of Copts and Jews to hold key offices in their country, only affording Muslims the right to rule their fellow Muslims—with the obligation, of course, to secure their subjects' loyalty by enforcing sharia. Qattawi's grandchildren today are living in exile, while Wassef's can have no doubt about whether a Copt will serve as Egypt's next head of state or government—only about when fundamentalists will next attack one of their churches or bomb a Christian school.

Notably, and despite initial skepticism about the notion of democracy, Egypt held elections in this period that liberal and left wing parties were able to win, as radical nationalists and Islamists failed to mobilize voters. In the 1930s, King Farouk moved to curb his country's democratization, scaling back parliament's powers when it announced plans to strip him of some of his own. The leftists and liberals formed a majority in parliament, fighting back against the power-conscious Farouk, with hordes of workers and students taking to the streets to demonstrate against Egypt's monarch for the first time in history. The Muslim Brotherhood sensed its chance.

Not yet officially a political party, the Muslim Brotherhood's

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members joined with the ultranationalists of Misr al-Fatah (Young Egypt), founded in October 1933 and modeled on the NSDAP (Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei, or National Socialist German Workers' Party). Misr al-Fatah even used the Hitler salute as its party greeting. Two young officers in this party, Gamal Abdel Nasser and Anwar Sadat, would go on to shape Egypt's destiny, both endorsing collaboration with the Brotherhood at this point.

Both Misr al-Fatah and the Muslim Brotherhood developed paramilitary wings modeled on those of fascist groups in Italy and Germany, gathering arms and training troops in secret camps. From this point on, the Muslim Brotherhood's youth division dressed in brown shirts, chanting during their training, "Struggle, obedience, silence!"—a borrowing from Mussolini's Blackshirts. Supporters of the Young Egypt party, meanwhile, dressed in green shirts, parading through Cairo's streets with torches and cries of "Egypt first," an echo of "*Deutschland, Deutschland über alles.*"

While the Second World War was being fought, Anwar Sadat was arrested and jailed for maintaining contact with Germany's secret service and possessing German communication equipment. Egypt's army was unwilling to wade into the war, yet King Farouk considered himself closer to the Axis powers of Berlin and Rome than to London, eagerly attempting to contact the Nazi regime. Hitler, knowing what Egypt meant to Britain, gratefully accepted King Farouk's attempts to cozy up, which were supported by Young Egypt and the Muslim Brotherhood.

Before the outbreak of the Second World War, the Muslim Brotherhood's support base had remained negligible. When Nazi propaganda was circulated in Egypt, and anti-Semitic sentiment

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in the Nile region was mounting, this changed. Hassan al-Banna kept the spark of anti-Semitism alight, writing in a journal that the Axis nations of Berlin, Rome, and Tokyo were already quasi-Islamic, and he called on the religious al-Azhar Institution to send Islamic scholars to the inspiring countries in question, educating them more intensively about Islam and discovering more in return about their strict social organization and its underlying ideology.¹²

In other publications, Muslim Brotherhood members encouraged rumors that Hitler had converted, making a secret pilgrimage to Mecca and taking the new name Hajj Mohamed Hitler—clearly doing all they could to stir up Nazi sympathies in Egypt's populace, principally to weaken the British. Were Hitler to attack Egypt, they assured readers, only British structures would be severely affected; mosques and Islamic structures would be spared by the god-fearing führer.

Whether the Brotherhood mounted this propaganda campaign for the Nazis on King Farouk's orders, following contact with Germany, or simply on its own initiative remains unclear. Former minister of education Taha Hussein, one of Egypt's foremost literary scholars, publicly criticized both Farouk and the Brotherhood for their pro-German stance, while Abbas el-Akkad, another author and member of parliament, accused the Brotherhood of accepting secret payment from Nazi intelligence to sow fascism's seeds in Egypt. In his 2009 book *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World*, Jeffrey Herf backs el-Akkad's claims, arguing that the Nazis saw the Muslim Brotherhood as more than a potential military ally—indeed, as a means of spreading their core anti-Semitic ideas worldwide.¹³

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THE FIFTY-POINT PROGRAM

Egypt's democratic parties were divided in the Second World War; some were keen to join the conflict on Britain's side and thus secure full independence, some insisted that Egypt maintain its neutrality and stay out of the war. When still others demonstrated anew against King Farouk in Egypt's streets, the Muslim Brotherhood rushed to his aid, its supporters counterprotesting against demonstrators with placards held high that read, "Allah is with the king."

Hassan al-Banna proposed several times that Farouk be crowned "Amir al-Mu'minin," "Commander of the Faithful," in a restored caliphate. As early as the king's coronation in 1936, he had composed an open letter to the new sovereign and leaders of the Arab world, titled "Toward the Light," in which he demanded a list of fifty measures by which the light in question could be reached.¹⁴ In the letter, which is itself alarmingly clear proof of the Muslim Brotherhood's totalitarian, fascist ideology, al-Banna demands *inter alia*:

1. Dissolution of all political parties and reconstitution of the ummah's political forces as a united front.
2. Legal reforms in keeping with every detail of Islamic sharia.
3. A reinforced military with diversified youth divisions, a militarist spirit lit in their members and based on Islamic jihad.
4. Closer cooperation with other Islamic countries on matters relating to the former caliphate.
5. Promotion of an Islamic ethos among governmental authorities.

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6. Monitoring of officials' behavior in private, as no practical distinction between professional and private life is possible.
7. Restructuring of working hours to permit fulfillment of religious duties.
8. Adjustment of all official provisions (holidays, working hours, etc.) in line with Islamic requirements.
9. Employment of graduates of the religious al-Azhar Institution in military and administrative fields.

This fifty-point manifesto still serves as a political program today—not just for the Muslim Brotherhood's members but also for those of countless other Islamist groups. Following the Brotherhood's election victory seventy-six years later in 2012, its demands were even discussed in detail in Egypt's parliament. Faced with demands like these, it remains a mystery to me how anyone can claim that Mohamed Morsi's eventual removal from office was a departure from democracy.

When Morsi was elected president, the Muslim Brotherhood strengthened its presence in all Egypt's institutions, hoping to implement al-Banna's program in the fullness of time. An entire people were held hostage, only ultimately freeing themselves by violent means—the only means available to them, democratic or not.

TERROR IN THE IMAGE OF THE SS

Whenever a group worships militarism, deems democracy dangerous, partitions the world into believers and unbelievers, and considers jihad its highest goal, it can only be a question of time before it takes up arms to eliminate its opponents. The Muslim

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Brotherhood's first enemies were Egypt's left-wing parties, even as Hassan al-Banna construed the concept of social justice as an essentially Islamic one. Knowing Egypt's electorate was distinctly left-leaning and likely to remain so for the foreseeable future, al-Banna declared war on his opponents not in the ballot box but in the street, tasking his militia with spreading public fear.

Initially, its missions—like those of Nazi militias early on—were limited to brutal assaults on left-wing demonstrations and industrial strikes. Al-Banna went so far as to furnish his Brotherhood with its own secret service, naming it al-Jihaz al-Sirri, “the secret apparatus.” How this group came into weapons, money, and know-how as quickly as it did is still a mystery today; beyond doubt, regular Saudi financial aid was instrumental, but many experts see the training of a professional parallel army, along with sustainable administrative and secret-service structures, as evidence of collaboration with foreign intelligence.

Ali Ashmawi, one of the early leaders of al-Jihaz al-Sirri and later an escapee from the movement, reveals in his book *The Secret History of the Muslim Brotherhood* that prior to setting up the secret apparatus, Hassan al-Banna studied not only the structures of Nazi security services and the Gestapo but also those of underground Zionist groups.¹⁵ One major influence on the concept of an elite unit, at any rate, must have been the medieval Islamic group that staged countless political attacks between 1080 and 1270, known throughout history as “assassins” thanks to Marco Polo's account of a sect whose members carried out murders while under the influence of drugs. The group's latinized name, now a byword for all the world's killers, has several possible derivations, one from the Arabic *hashish* (“the herb” or “hemp”) and *hashashin* (“hashish smokers”).

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In Syria, one Sufist sect was also known as *asasin*, and later the term would be used pejoratively to describe people “off their heads.”

Hassan-i Sabbah (ca. 1034–1124), the group’s Persian founder, is said to have brought his followers to storm Alamut’s mountain fortress, tempting them with offers of opium and hashish and providing good food and beautiful women to put them in mind of paradise ahead of their morbid mission. These followers are said to have supported him so unquestioningly that they voluntarily took their own lives when ordered to. Both his sons were executed, meanwhile, for “misconduct.”

Even if some accounts of the assassins began as fantasies of the itinerant Marco Polo, they bring to mind the fearsome promises made by many jihadist preachers today, who entice their own devotees to suicide with the same promises of paradise. Similarly, before deploying troops in his war with Saddam Hussein, Ayatollah Khomeini once distributed plastic keys to his underage soldiers, claiming them to be keys to paradise.¹⁶

Hassan al-Banna certainly dreamed of a division whose members would follow him uncritically and unflinchingly, converts to his cause like the assassins of the Middle Ages or Hitler’s SS, and total loyalty remains a core principle of the Muslim Brotherhood today. Members of the secret apparatus were painstakingly screened on al-Banna’s orders before being admitted; Brotherhood members were permitted to join only if they were deemed “unblemished,” came from an exclusive circle of select families, and underwent numerous forms of training and initiation rituals.

Tharwat al-Khribawi, another escapee from the Brotherhood and author of the exposé *The Secret of the Temple*, reports that its secret wing combined totalitarian and mafia-like elements, drawing

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additionally on freemasonry for its internal hierarchy and initiatory hazing.¹⁷ He describes new members being required to turn up at a secret location where, while holding a pistol, they swear an oath on the Qur'an in front of leading apparatus members, promise their intent to remain forever unquestioning loyal to the movement and its figureheads, then quickly dismantle and reassemble the weapon.

In the first months of 1945, Hassan al-Banna stood for Egypt's parliament. When to his great surprise he lost, al-Banna threatened to march on the nation's parliament with 200,000 of his supporters, just as Mussolini's Blackshirts had in 1922 and as Hitler attempted to do in his failed putsch the following year. Shortly thereafter, leftist prime minister Ahmad Mahir was shot and killed by a young nationalist named Mustafa Essawy, who was exposed only a few years later as a member of the Brotherhood's secret apparatus. Mahir was murdered after proposing war with Japan in parliament; Britain had informed Egypt's government that after the war, a commonwealth of nations would be formed, with membership reserved for those countries who declared war with at least one Axis power before March 1, 1945.

Britain hoped Egypt would declare war with Germany, but King Farouk insistently opposed the idea, selecting Japan instead. Hilmi Namnam, expert on Islamism and author of *The Hassan al-Banna No One Knew*, speculates that the prime minister's assassination may have been set in motion by Germany, arguing Nazi ties with the Muslim Brotherhood were closer than widely assumed, thanks to Amin al-Husseini.¹⁸ At any rate, al-Banna hoped for German victory—both on ideological grounds and so as to free Egypt from British rule and its own liberal and left-wing parties, which stood in the way of his ambitions for theocracy.

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Germany and its allies lost the war, but al-Banna's goals and his movement's terrorism survived, with only Farouk distancing himself from them over time. In 1947, the Muslim Brotherhood mounted attacks on numerous state structures and cinemas, which resulted in the deaths of two British citizens and a judge who previously sentenced several of the Brotherhood's members.¹⁹

An opportunity to expand the organization's scope came with the founding of the Israeli state. Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon all promptly declared war with newborn Israel, and countless fighters from the Muslim Brotherhood joined the Egyptian army in Palestine, hopeful to return home victorious heroes—yet the proud armies of Arabia suffered crushing defeats and returned home “dishonored.”

In the wake of this failure, the Brotherhood intensified its terrorist attacks at home, primarily targeting state structures and Egypt's Jews. When new prime minister Mahmoud an Nukrashi issued a decree in 1948 banning and forcibly dissolving the Brotherhood, he, too, was assassinated by one of its members. Authorities reacted with a harsh crackdown, arresting many other members. Hassan al-Banna was himself shot and killed in a public street on February 12, 1949, possibly on the orders of an Egyptian royal family that eyed his movement and its activities with mounting discomfort—yet it was only the following year that the Muslim Brotherhood was to be rehabilitated.

DEMOCRACY AS A TROJAN HORSE

Like his role model Hitler, al-Banna had opposed a multiparty system, viewing democracy as little more than a battlefield on

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which parties brawled at the expense of national interests. The failure of Hitler's attempted putsch in 1923 forced him to seek power the long way around, but despite standing in democratic elections, Hitler never disguised his intentions. For him, democracy was a means of seizing the reins of power, with mainstream parties' belief in their own ability to control him playing into his hands—politician Franz von Papen infamously claimed the underestimated Hitler would soon be pushed into such a tight corner that he would “squeal.” Hitler's appointment as chancellor was meant to teach established parties a lesson, but in any case, he came to power under a democratic system, making good use of its rules only to supplant them one by one with a dictatorship.

The Muslim Brotherhood has always had a similar relationship with and understanding of democracy. After al-Banna's death, the Brotherhood recognized the need for pragmatic alliances on its way to power, first attempting to cozy up to the Free Officers movement, a group embittered by defeat in Palestine and led by Gamal Abdel Nasser. Israel remained unconquered while British occupation continued, with the king either unable or unwilling to act against either.

The Muslim Brotherhood, now opposing openly Farouk, supported the military putsch of July 1952, which forced the king to abdicate and flee to Italy. A power struggle followed in Egypt, and the Brotherhood's alliance with Nasser's movement broke down when he planned to implement socialism—its members demanded theocracy and liberals and the left struggled to restore democracy. Nasser was prepared to offer concessions, enacting democratic reforms, but the Brotherhood rose up in rebellion, subjecting the country to terrorism once again. After a failed attempt on Nasser's

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life in October 1954, the Islamist group's higher-ups were arrested; some of them were executed, and the Brotherhood was banned for the second time in its history, with tens of thousands of members sent to encampments.²⁰

In captivity, the Brotherhood grew only more radical; splinter groups and terrorist movements formed on the outside that would go on to show not just Egypt but the whole world what terror really meant. Of all the splinter groups that broke off from the Muslim Brotherhood around this time, the three most dangerous would prove to be Harkat-ul-Jihad al-Islami, al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya, and the Takfir wal-Hijra movement.

A fresh wave of terrorist attacks gripped Egypt in the mid-1960s, with factories and military targets attacked and left in ruin by Islamists. As a result, the movement's new mastermind, Sayyid Qutb, was executed, though the neo-jihadist mentality he preached still influences Islamists all over the Islamic world. (More on this later.) In the Six-Day War of 1967, a second military defeat allowed Egypt's Islamists an ideological breakthrough. Viewing Nasser's secular socialism as a failure, they yearned to resurrect the dream of a theocracy, and the Muslim Brotherhood's new slogan was born. "*Al-Islam huwal hal*"—"Islam is the solution."

The phrase found mass support among Egypt's people, though in Nasser's police state the Brotherhood had no access to official politics. Consequently, many teachers, professors, doctors, and engineers from the Muslim Brotherhood's ranks emigrated to Saudi Arabia. What first seemed like a retreat turned out to be of great use, as the exiles in question propagated Sayyid Qutb's jihadist ideas rigorously, preparing the ground for a second marriage of Saudi Wahhabism with the Muslim Brotherhood's ideas decades later.

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After Gamal Abdel Nasser's unexpected death in 1970, his deputy, Anwar Sadat, took over the reins of Egyptian power, attempting to effect a change of course and distancing himself from Soviet Russia while resuming relations with the West. Nasserists and Marxists alike rebelled, with a democratic student movement forming to accuse Sadat of remaining antidemocratic while he still retained the authoritarian style of rule Nasser had left behind. Bombarded on all sides, Sadat sought reinforcements and found them in the Muslim Brotherhood and its Islamist allies.

The Brotherhood became kingmakers once again, serving as a key instrument allowing Sadat to retain power; yet once more its supporters would bite the hand that fed them. The terrorist group Harkat-ul-Jihad al-Islami, originally a splinter group from the Muslim Brotherhood, ultimately killed President Sadat for signing a peace treaty with Israel, in turn prompting Sadat's successor, Hosni Mubarak, to step up the country's police state.

Over and over, Mubarak would justify harsh crackdowns and postponements of democratic reform by claiming that they helped keep the Islamist threat at bay. This pattern recurs throughout the Brotherhood's history: its members seek access to power by securing pacts with and supporting rival groups, only to turn on them; then the Brotherhood is banned, only to undergo rehabilitation and emerge stronger each time around.

Faced with Mubarak's crackdowns, some of Egypt's Islamist fighters fled the land, absconding to Afghanistan to fight the Soviets—and here the Muslim Brotherhood would consummate its third marriage with Wahhabists, the same Islamists who returned home to Egypt, Algeria, and Saudi Arabia after the war to unleash fresh waves of terrorism there, targeting police, tourists, and foreign

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infrastructure. The Brotherhood's political wing remained active in Egypt throughout all of this, outwardly paying lip service to non-violence while working tirelessly behind the scenes to build a new covert network worldwide. This was in keeping with the group's first principles in the 1920s—first to Islamize the Arab region and then to conquer the world.

From outside, it seemed that the Muslim Brotherhood had shrunk to a negligible size over the course of Mubarak's thirty-year rule, but no one profited more from the stagnation of the period than did the Islamists. In areas the state had abandoned, like education and health, Islamists appeared, putting in place their own structures—schools, hospitals, charitable institutions, and the like. Even if in reality they had no intention of improving education or healthcare for the populace—much less to combat poverty—many Egyptians got the impression that the Brotherhood offered a genuine political alternative.

After the Arab Spring erupted in December 2010, it seemed that the Muslim Brotherhood had come within an inch of achieving its original goals, winning majorities in Egyptian and Tunisian elections between 2011 and 2012 and moving to implement its Islamist agenda there at lightning speed. Particularly in Egypt, this agenda bore fascist elements, with al-Banna's old fifty-point program discussed in parliament, as mentioned above. The country's justice system was set to be Islamized by President Morsi's decree; electoral laws were altered and national institutions subverted—measures Hitler likewise enacted soon after taking power.

Unlike in 1930s' Germany, however, a politicized society turned out to be a decisive force for good—they were not willing to look on passively as endless conflicts raged between its military

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and fundamentalists, nor were they willing to wait to see which side came out on top while the fruits of the Arab Spring were destroyed in the crossfire. Egypt's people had deposed Morsi after finding themselves unable to bear his regime's oppression and paternalism a day longer. Did they turn their backs on democracy in doing so? I think not—quite the opposite.

Democrats drew the short straw in Egypt's elections and were forced to admit bitter defeat. Islamists, meanwhile, achieved great success, especially in Egypt's poorer states—not just in parliamentary polls but in the country's presidential ones as well. Yet Morsi had been supported by factions of the liberal camp, promising to serve as a president for all Egyptians. Mere months after being elected, the man had shown himself to be “Mubarak with a beard,” kicking democracy while it was down and issuing decrees to guarantee himself absolute power. All organized opposition was banned, state institutions subverted, and critical media silenced in court. After only a year in office, millions of disenchanting citizens took to the streets again, forcing the military to intervene by removing Morsi from office.

There have been heated debates over whether what happened was a putsch—Morsi, some say, was after all elected. My view is that, far from a putsch, his removal was necessary for democracy to mean anything, and I am not alone in thinking so.

What with Egypt's parliament being dissolved, bringing a vote of no confidence was an impossibility—mass protest was all that remained, and what followed was violent enough that the army itself felt unable to stand back and spectate. Certainly its intervention bore elements of self-interest. More or less from the start, the army had had its problems with Morsi and his devotees, objecting

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to his policy on Syria. In Syria, the Muslim Brotherhood was allied with Hamas—which was troubling for Egypt’s generals—and had called on Egyptians to join the jihad in Syria. In the summer of 2012, sixteen Egyptian soldiers had been killed by Hamas-affiliated militants in the Sinai. The Brotherhood’s calls to jihad caused unrest in the army’s ranks, while, once Morsi was in government, the Brotherhood permitted the terrorist group Ansar Bait al-Maqdis to operate in the Sinai. (The group has since declared itself part of the Islamic State.) On top of all this, Morsi’s amateurish economics had finally ruined his country financially.

Egypt’s future remains up in the air, with several scenarios being guessed at, but the Brotherhood’s return to power, at least in the near future, is the least likely. Broad swathes of Egypt’s populace, as well as its army, police, and judicial system, now oppose the Muslim Brotherhood, since many Egyptians view both the Islamic State and Ansar Beit al-Maqdis as the natural offspring of the Brotherhood’s ideology. When hundreds of the group’s members were handed the death sentence, public protests were scarce; Egypt’s people were under no illusion of a free or democratic ruling, yet they were willing to stage their own war on terror.

One phrase ubiquitous after the Brotherhood’s parliamentary triumph over their liberal rivals was “*ghazwat-al-sanadiq*,” meaning “the conquest of the ballot box.” The word *ghazwa* alludes to the conquests the Prophet Muhammad waged in the seventh century against unbelieving Meccans and Arabia’s Jewish tribes, attacking Meccan trade caravans, stealing their goods, and either driving out, murdering, or enslaving Jews—an approach deemed legitimate since Jews and Meccans alike were unbelievers. Islamists under Morsi inflicted much the same fate on their oppo-

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nents, labeling them unbelievers and excluding them from key negotiations over Egypt's new constitution—indeed, al-Qaeda had referred to its attacks on the World Trade Center with the phrase “*ghazwat* New York.” When anti-Morsi demonstrators allied with the army, making clear they had no intention of returning the deposed president to office, the Muslim Brotherhood turned to violence again, calling for their opponents' elimination. Even this forms part of a familiar pattern, demonstrating once and for all what a totalitarian group it is. In January 2015, having lost all hope of winning back Egyptian hearts and minds, the Brotherhood instructed its members to prepare for a long, painful jihad; the next day, bombs were discovered all over Egypt, while banks and businesses were being set ablaze. The group, it seems, is back to doing what it does best.

The Brotherhood has by no means suffered a final defeat, its tumultuous past showcasing its talent for adaptation. The scale of its remaining support is not to be understated, nor is the mind-set unleashed throughout its history yet a thing of Egypt's past—for the Muslim Brotherhood's ideology rests on an age-old tradition.

CHAPTER 3

ISLAMIC FASCISM'S HISTORIC ROOTS FROM ABRAHAM TO SAYYID QUTB

Each year, Muslims worldwide celebrate Eid, commemorating the story of Abraham and his son as detailed in both the Bible and the Qur'an. Abraham, supposed forefather of all Jews, Christians, and Muslims, is said to have seen himself sacrificing his son to God in a dream. In the Qur'an's version, Abraham wakes the next morning, retrieves a knife immediately, and makes a rush for his son, informing him of the dream.¹ "My son!" Abraham declares. "I have seen in a vision that I offer thee in sacrifice: now see what is thy view." His son replies, "Father, do as thou art commanded: thou wilt find me, if Allah so wills, one of the steadfast!"

"When they had both submitted to [the will of God] and he had laid him prostrate on his forehead," the Qur'an continues, "[God] called out to him 'O Abraham! Thou hast already fulfilled the vision!' Thus indeed do We reward those who do right. For this was obviously a trial, and We ransomed him with a momentous sacrifice: and We left this blessing for him among generations to come in later times: 'Peace and salutation to Abraham!' Thus indeed do We reward those who do right. For he was one of Our believing Servants." In the end, then, God stops Abraham from

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sacrificing his son, praising his righteousness and intention to carry out the deed, and takes an animal in the boy's place.

Several aspects of the story ought to raise eyebrows today. Abraham willingly obeys his führer's orders—that is to say, God's—without pausing to question their rationality or morality, even when they require him to sacrifice his own son. Unquestioning obedience and self-sacrifice are both core features of a fascist worldview, but Abraham's actions—indeed his eagerness to display both these traits—are just as illustrative of Islam's core principles. (The very term *Islam* is derived from the Arabic verb *aslama*, meaning “to submit or surrender oneself to another.”)

Despite his son being a child with no knowledge of God or sacrifices made to him, Abraham consults him on the matter of his prospective death. Fascists employ this tactic, too, offering the public only the illusion of choice where decisions have long since been made for them—a sleight of hand Joseph Goebbels used in all its perfidy in his infamous speech at Berlin's Sportpalast, the German people roaring “*Ja!*” when he asked them, “Do you want total war?” As the war he spoke of steadily proved impossible to win, it was the people who were held to blame, their insufficient commitment to it ostensibly bringing German defeats about.

In some respects, fascism could be called a distant cousin of monotheism. Religions that revere a multitude of gods are, by and large, more tolerant and adaptable than the three great monotheistic faiths: among polytheists, responsibilities are shared between different gods, individual deities governing life, death, fertility, famine and so on. These deities are complementary and interdependent, and believers are able to decide which ones to turn to

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based on circumstance. The god of Abraham, by contrast, has always been jealous, allowing no other gods beside himself.

The notion a single creator god determines all that happens in our lives—a god who monitors us twenty-four hours a day, eavesdropping on our thoughts and dreams, policing our lives with shalt and shalt-nots and punishing transgressions with torment in hell—is the basis for the dictatorship of religion, which in its turn is the basis for all other forms of dictatorship. Atop every dictatorship stands a proprietor of absolute truth, offering to show others the way and asking in return only that they surrender their autonomy and common sense, becoming unquestioning followers. Salvation, the claim goes, is only attainable by the one true path.

ABRAHAM, MUHAMMAD, AND THE THREAT OF DISSENT

Abraham's search for the one true god is said to have been a lengthy one. After his religious awakening, the Bible tells how he parted ways with his original tribe, setting out to revere this new god and let others know of him; in the Qur'an, meanwhile, Abraham remains with his tribe, quarrelling with his father, Azar—a devotee of the old gods—and smashing his religious idols. On being told to desert their gods, the angry mob cast Abraham into a fire for defaming them—only for God to cool the flames, saving Abraham by a miracle.

As a young merchant traveling to Damascus and back, Muhammad would have met plenty of Christians and Jews, discovering biblical narratives. Muhammad named his only son Ibrahim, the Arabic form of Abraham, with tales of the man proving central

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to the philosophy he later called Islam. In hopes of enticing Christians and Jews, Muhammad claimed Abraham as a forefather just as they did, though with one slight difference.

Poring over the biblical account of Abraham, Muhammad came across Ishmael, his little-discussed first son by the Egyptian slave woman Hagar. All we learn of Ishmael and his mother in the Bible is that Abraham abandons them in the desert when his wife, Sarah, has grown jealous of Hagar. Muhammad claimed Ishmael, rather than Sarah's son Isaac, to have served as Abraham's would-be sacrifice—and that Ishmael's line, accordingly, were Abraham's true heirs. In an inspired move on Muhammad's part, the Qur'an subsequently tells of Abraham and Ishmael constructing Mecca's Kaaba as a site of pilgrimage for their descendants—pilgrimage, not by chance, being the oldest pagan tradition of the Arab tribes Muhammad hoped to win over to his cause.

With its surrounding town situated on the principal trading route between Damascus and Yemen, the Kaaba served at the time as Arabia's religious hub. Before the advent of Islam, tribes were allowed to honor their various deities in or near the Kaaba—a central site for polytheists—with Christians even permitted to hang icons of Jesus and Mary inside. At the time, the Kaaba was a meeting point for all Arabia's traders, and this settlement was a show of much-needed pragmatism—nonetheless, such tolerance was to vanish after Islam's triumph.

When Muhammad first set out in Mecca, intent on preaching his new philosophy, its townspeople allowed him to do so outside the Kaaba. At first, Muhammad styled himself as open-minded, declaring in the Qur'an, "For you is your religion, for me is my religion."² Only when he set out to ban all deities except his own

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in the Kaaba's vicinity did a conflict arise between him and other tribes' leaders, who feared for their custom with good reason.

Pre-Islamic Arabia was a hotbed of tribal conflicts and disputes, stoked by the superpowers on either side of its borders—the Byzantine and Sasanian Empires, specifically, both of whom knew exactly how to use Arabia's tribes as pawns in proxy wars throughout the region. Muhammad dreamed, meanwhile, of a greater Arab empire, with the Kaaba as its religious nerve center—a dream, it seems, that ran in his family. Muhammad's grandfather Qusai ibn Kilab tried to close ranks with Medina in hopes of unifying Arabia's warring tribes. Qusai was destined to die before his ambition could be realized, but Muhammad would reap the profits of his grandfather's alliances with Medina, still known at the time as Yathrib.

For thirteen years, Muhammad preached in the streets of Mecca to no appreciable avail, only a few hundred people—most of them slaves—opted to follow him. Only when he and his followers moved to Medina did Muhammad's breakthrough come, as he mediated between the warring Aws and Khazraj tribes and was ultimately appointed Medina's civic leader.

Muhammad tried initially to cozy up to Medina's Jews, whose traditions he found appealing, working Jewish obligations and proscriptions such as ritual cleansing, prayer, fasting, and avoidance of pork into his movement—even establishing Jerusalem as the city Muslims faced to pray. Muhammad called these shalts and shalt-nots *sharia*, a direct translation of the Jewish term *halakha*, the name of Judaism's juristic tradition and behavioral code; both words, Hebrew and Arabic, mean “the path.”

Muhammad went so far as to draft a fifty-two-point constitution, clarifying how Jews and Muslims ought to coexist. It guaran-

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teed freedom of belief yet jeopardized Jewish neutrality in several fields, requiring Jews to lend Muhammad military support and avoid all future trade with pagan Meccans. Invoking Abraham and integrating biblical narratives and prophets into the Qur'an, Muhammad hoped Jews and Christians would adopt his new religion, yet the majority of those from different faiths kept their distance, with Medina's Jews in particular reluctant to risk their neutrality and flexibility in relations with various Arab tribes. When Mecca found itself at war with Muhammad, some of these Jews even sided with the pagan city: Muhammad retaliated by exterminating the Jews of Khaybar wholesale. To this day, Islamists demonstrating all around the world continue to chant, "*Khaybar Khaybar, ya yahud, Jaish Muhammad, sa yau'ud*"—"Remember Khaybar, Jews, for Muhammad's army will return."

From this point on, the Prophet executed an about-face, setting on the true path by violent means anyone who refused to be swayed by words. Once Muhammad had retaken his hometown of Mecca, he dispensed with his early to-each-their-own sermons. Like Abraham before him, Muhammad destroyed the idols that surrounded the Kaaba, putting to death Meccans who resisted his rule. Muhammad even killed one unarmed man taking refuge in the Kaaba, which violated a long-standing taboo since Meccans considered the Kaaba a place of nonviolence.

Muhammad had their city cleansed entirely of Jews and Christians, assembling a task force with the specific mission of staging assaults against his opponents. Among its victims were Jewish poets who criticized or lampooned him, as well as the leaders of tribes that had taken up arms against his rule. In one act of particular brutality, Muhammad sent his task force—led by his adopted son, Zayd—to

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put an old woman to death for calling him a liar, encouraging forty of her children and grandchildren to go to war with him.³ Zayd personally killed all her children and grandchildren, sparing only one attractive woman as a personal slave for Muhammad, before tying the old woman in between two horses and driving them in opposing directions, tearing her in two while still alive.

As well as subjecting his opponents to fear and terror, Muhammad's violence sowed seeds of intolerance at the heart of Islam—seeds that would take root and that bear rotten fruit today. Because of him, a hub of religious pluralism became a monotheist stronghold; because of him, Islam's god became imperious, unpredictable, and angry—an eternal dictator on high, refusing point-blank to negotiate, punishing apostates with the pain of hell, and choosing who deserves to live or die—a power-crazed god opposed to all others, never to be questioned and stopping at nothing to uphold his own power.

After each war Muhammad waged against the tribes of Mecca, he waged a war against a Jewish tribe that refused to submit to his rule; the Qur'an's statements on Jews at the time grew polemical and hostile. Where once Jews had been "faithful people of scripture," they became "falsifiers of scripture."⁴ Hostility of this kind escalated until the Qur'an came to refer to Jews as "apes" and "swine." Three of Medina's Jewish tribes were outlawed, the fourth charged with high treason: on Muhammad's instruction, all its men were executed, its women and children were sold as slaves, and Muslims resumed praying toward Mecca instead of Jerusalem once Medina was rid of all its Jews.

Surah 8 refers to Muhammad's altercations with Jews, its text describing Jews as animals damned to remain backstabbers forever:

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“Indeed, the worst of living creatures in the sight of Allah are those who have disbelieved, and they will not [ever] believe—the ones with whom you made a treaty but then they break their pledge every time, and they do not fear Allah. So if you, [O Muhammad], gain dominance over them in war, disperse by [means of] them those behind them that perhaps they will be reminded.”

And so the ethnic cleansing of Arabia began, designed to rid the region of all unbelievers and lay the foundations for an expanding Islamic empire. Its first moments were those in which the earliest form of Islamic fascism was born.

Upon his death, Muhammad left Muslims the Qur’an and tens of thousands of *hadith*, containing detailed instructions for all aspects of life, including how Muslims ought to sit on the toilet in a godly manner. All he neglected to tell his followers was who should succeed him as their leader, along with what credentials this next ruler needed. As a result, severe conflicts broke out among Muslims only a few years after Muhammad died, culminating in a schism between the Sunnite and Shiite communities. At the time, the fundamental difference between the two lay in the fact that Shiites recognized only Muhammad’s direct descendants as his successors, while Sunnites accepted leaders who hailed from all ten of Mecca’s tribes. The Sunnite-Shiite conflict led to a brutal civil war that put the Islamic movement to the ultimate test mere decades after its founder’s death.

Emerging over time, one of the most traumatic marks this schism left was the concept of *hakimiyyah*, “the rule of God on Earth,” its core statements being both that only divine authority furnished a ruler with power or stripped him of it and that God reigned on Earth with such rulers as his representatives, entrusted

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to carry out his will. All Muslims, the concept of *hakimiyyah* stated, bore a duty to obey their rulers, while acts of rebellion and criticism were tantamount to questioning God himself.

Hakimiyyah gave rise to two Islamic concepts: for Shiites, that of the imam; for Sunnites, rule by the grace of God. Principally among Sunnites, agreement was reached that rebellion against those in power was by definition rebellion against God, threatening the entire ummah with schisms and confusion. Two passages from the Qur'an were cited to this effect, one instructing Muslims, "Obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you,"⁵ the other stating, "*fitnah* [dissent] is worse than killing."⁶

Such convictions are equally central to fascist movements and totalitarian regimes. Those who deviate from their faith or ideology are branded unbelievers or traitors to the fatherland, then cast out or put to death.

In Sunnite states such as Egypt, Morocco, and Jordan, where theocracy is yet to become reality, the argument persists that Muslims have tried all possible systems of governance, from nationalism to Marxism to capitalism, without any of them bearing fruit in the Islamic world, ostensibly because they are too alien and un-Islamic. Citing history as evidence that the nation's glory days were those in which God's will was carried out on Earth, religious orthodoxy presents itself as the one true alternative; today's Salafists and jihadists dream of turning back the clock and restoring the social order Muhammad enforced in Medina. A fully Islamized society that carries out God's will, their arguments insist, requires the Prophet's teachings to take the world by storm.

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IBN HANBAL, SALADIN, AND THE DREAM OF UNITY

Four different schools of *fiqh*, or Islamic jurisprudence, exist, of which three are considered moderate. The Malikite, Shafi'ite, and Hanafist schools allow limited room for interpretation of the Qur'an and Islamic tradition; Muslims who live by their demands occasionally have the opportunity to choose between several behavioral codes that make life in the modern world easier without venturing outside the realm of Islamic doctrine. Ultimately, of course, all three remain conservative, allowing interpretation and discretion only when no clear passage in the Qur'an or statement of the Prophet on a given topic can be unearthed. Since the Prophet made tens of thousands of surviving statements a Muslim might draw guidance from in any conceivable dilemma, room for interpretation remains scarce.

The most conservative of the four schools, however, is Hanbalism, founded in ninth century Baghdad by Ahmad ibn Hanbal (780–855) after Islam's Shiite-Sunnite schism. Far from being governed by sharia law, Baghdad was a permissive city at the time, with alcohol, singing, and dancing alike as parts of its daily life. At the palace of the caliph, contests were even held in which Jewish, Muslim, and Christian poets competed, criticizing one another's religions in their compositions; some of the verses in question mounted direct attacks on the Prophet Muhammad yet were never deemed offensive.

Just as remarkable is that certain schools of *fiqh* emerged at the time, many of which independently questioned both the Qur'an's divinity and its inerrancy. One of these schools, Mu'tazilism, read

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Qur'anic scripture as applying specifically to its own seventh-century context, sparking debates over whether the Qur'an was truly "everlasting divine writ"—or, rather, a document of its creators' time, without far-reaching significance for centuries to come. Life in ninth-century Baghdad was different enough in the eyes of Mu'tazilists from life in seventh-century Mecca and Medina that they never felt any obligation to enforce Muhammad's judicial code to the letter. In the Islamic world today, their stance would be unthinkable, as would the tolerant camaraderie found at the caliph's palace in Baghdad.

With the spread of Islam to parts of the former Persian and Byzantine Empires, Muslim thinkers encountered Greek philosophy and Jewish and Persian folklore. A new Islamic theology emerged, willing to argue rationally so as to keep up with other religions' followers—an occurrence that caused the forces of conservatism great anxiety. Ibn Hanbal feared Muslim schisms would continue, with rival new theological schools competing endlessly, unless a return to literal readings of the Qur'an and the Prophet's statements prevailed. Ceding room for interpretation would, he felt certain, lay the ground for sectarian secession, leading in the long run to civil war—so Ibn Hanbal founded the ultraconservative school of jurisprudence that lies at the core of fundamentalist Islam today.

In prosperous Baghdad, Ibn Hanbal's theology initially fell on deaf ears. Nor was this to prove his sole obstacle: due to his strict orthodox stance, Ibn Hanbal himself was imprisoned. By contrast, comparatively moderate schools of *fiqh* flourished in times of strength and prosperity for the Islamic empire, shaping jurisprudence in Andalusia, Baghdad, and Cairo. It was only in a time

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of crises, fragility, defeats, and schisms that Hanbalism's hour rolled round. While the Crusades stretched on, a wave of orthodoxy swept across the Islamic world, transforming its societies as their people dreamt of a faithful ruler uniting all Muslims under the banner of Islam and striking back against Christian conquerors. Saladin (1137–1193) came closest to achieving all this, declaring jihad, defeating crusading forces, and liberating Jerusalem from Christian rule in 1187. The dream of Muslim unity and victory against the West has permeated history ever since, with every Islamist leader envying Saladin's success and dreaming of a new Islamic golden age.

IBN TAYMIYYAH AND THE CONCEPT OF JIHAD

After Mongol assaults on the Islamic world in the thirteenth century, orthodoxy enjoyed a great revival and the conservative Hanbalist school of jurisprudence was resurrected by a scholar named Ibn Taymiyyah, the spiritual forefather of modern-day Salafists and Wahhabists. Osama bin Laden often cited Ibn Taymiyyah's example, especially his interpretation of the concept of jihad.

Ibn Taymiyyah (1263–1328) deemed it a ruler's principal task to implement sharia in its totality and enforce public compliance; those who failed to do so were undeserving of their subjects' loyalty.⁷ Ibn Taymiyyah also construed the concept of *tawhid*, "belief in one and only one god," extremely strictly, accusing Sufist Muslims of not being true monotheists for venerating not just Allah but all the sheikhs whose graves they regularly visited; for him, these graves' adornment was nothing less than a sign of *kufur*, or "heathenry." Accordingly, he held Shiite scholarship to be

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a falsification of Islam, since Shiites proclaimed the inerrancy of their imams. Ibn Taymiyyah labeled Syria's Alawites apostates to be punished with death, rejected medieval Islamic philosophy, and insisted that enlightenment was reachable only through faith in the truth of Islam's doctrines rather than through logic.

Ibn Taymiyyah's views were a product of his time and its events—when Mongols took Damascus in the late thirteenth century, the city's new rulers arrested and tortured him. Ibn Taymiyyah left Damascus to roam Egypt and Arabia, hoping to call the region's Muslim rulers to jihad, which he viewed not just as a means of hounding unbelievers but also as a duty unto God, this being the response believers were to show non-Muslims for all eternity.

Ibn Taymiyyah managed to persuade Egypt's sultan, Ibn Qalawun, to go to war against the Mongols, forcing them to retreat to Damascus, yet he did much more than just preach Islam. He personally joined the army as an active participant. His military theology remained largely unknown until several centuries later, when another preacher in Arabia revived his ideas. During the eighteenth century, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1702–1792), founder of Wahhabism, was following the teachings of Ibn Taymiyyah. He sought to cleanse the Islamic world of all things un-Islamic, starting with destroying the same Sufist burial sites across Arabia that had enraged his predecessor and demanding jihad as a long-term goal for all Muslims. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's own teachings, ultimately a poor imitation of Ibn Hanbal's and Ibn Taymiyya's, serve as the basis for Saudi Arabia's judicial system today, as well as modern Islamists' understanding of jihad.

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SAYYID QUTB AND THE SIXTH PILLAR OF ISLAM

Sayyid Qutb (1906–1966) started out as a literary critic—indeed, the literary world has him to thank for its discovery of Egyptian author Naguib Mahfouz, later a Nobel Prize winner. In several articles from the 1940s, Qutb was the first to note Mahfouz’s talent. That the world now remembers him for altogether different things speaks to the depth of the identity crisis Qutb, a Western-oriented intellectual, fell into while in the United States in the late 1940s.

On the orders of Egypt’s ministry of education, Qutb was shipped off to the States for two years to study its education system. There he grew enraged at the sight of his most important values being trampled in America, with racism, promiscuity, and money-worship part and parcel of everyday life. All of this spurred in Qutb a radical break from his former life, and after a religious awakening, he began studying the work of Indian theologian Abul Ala Maududi.

Maududi himself, rattled to his core by the collapse of the Islamic caliphate in 1924, had called on the world’s Muslims to reject modernity and return to the roots of the Islam. For him as for ibn Abd al-Wahhab, jihad was far more than a means of self-defense—it was a weapon with which to fight all things not in keeping with Islam’s laws and social order. Maududi saw Islam as more than just a religion; indeed he saw it as a regime meant to permeate all aspects of life, from politics, economics, and law to science, humanism, health, psychology, and sociology. Insisting a worldwide Islamic revolution was required to change the course of history, he called on Muslims to take part in it whether or not they lived in Islamic countries already. Muslim thinkers and lit-

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erary scholars were to provide a theoretical basis for his revolution, Maududi stressed, since “German National Socialism would never have enjoyed the success it did without the framework Fichte, Goethe and Nietzsche provided, taken up under the brilliant and strong leadership of Hitler and his comrades.”⁸

Like his fascist contemporaries, Maududi placed a high value on other Muslims’ willingness to make sacrifices for their cause. “Once you accept the rightness of Islam,” he once stated, “nothing remains except for you to strive with all your resolve to help it dominate the world, achieving victory or laying down your lives for the struggle.”⁹ Qutb agreed.

Maududi’s call to jihad drew on its eternal appeal to young Muslims as a means of overcoming feelings of impotence and helplessness. As soldiers victorious in the struggle to do God’s will on Earth or else falling in battle, they would be rewarded with eternity in paradise—a win-win situation, so to speak.

Even acts of murder were acceptable in Maududi’s eyes. “In God’s cause,” he wrote, “jihad involves making the greatest sacrifice of all, for those who fight in the struggle take others’ lives and worldly goods as well as giving up their own. As has been established previously, making a lesser sacrifice to shield oneself from greater harm ranks among the most basic Islamic principles. What is the sacrifice of a few human lives—even several thousand or more—next to the disaster that would befall humanity if evil were to triumph over good, aggressive atheism trumping the religion of God?”¹⁰

Inspired by statements like Maududi’s, Sayyid Qutb began composing his own texts in the United States. In his first essay, titled “The America I Have Seen,” he complains of Western decadence and consumerism, highlighting the alleged need for an

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Islamic social order. After the state of Israel was founded during his time in the United States, Qutb learned of the Arab armies' defeat; after hearing the following year of Hassan al-Banna's murder, he returned to Cairo, joining al-Banna's Muslim Brotherhood in 1951 and becoming its foremost mastermind. (Two of his books, *Signposts on the Road* and *The Future of This Religion*, remain key Islamist texts today.) As an Islamist on the left, Qutb initially endorsed President Nasser's socialist politics, but when the latter banned the Brotherhood in 1954 after a failed attempt on his life, Qutb turned his back on Nasser, deeming his rule un-Islamic and proclaiming—true to Ibn Taymiyyah's teachings—that Egypt's president, not having introduced sharia law, was neither to be obeyed nor to be recognized as its ruler.

From this point on, Qutb viewed Egypt not as an Islamic country in need of certain religious reforms but as an unbelieving nation ripe for Islamic conquest. The concept of *jahiliyyah* came to play a key role in Qutb's thinking, denoting the "ignorance" of the unconverted world. Ibn Taymiyyah had broadened the concept in his own time, terming his society's every deviation from Islam *jahiliyyah*, and Qutb also demanded Muslims cleanse themselves of all things un-Islamic; a truly independent society was possible in his eyes only once every individual had internalized the true faith and those convictions he deemed correct. Qutb hoped for a domino effect, a religious awakening sweeping the Islamic world with mounting momentum, catapulting the ummah back to its glory days.

In addition, he borrowed Maududi's concept of *hakimiyyah*, the absolute rule of God on Earth, unfettered by democracy, sovereignty of the people, or the nation-state itself. In Qutb's view,

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government gained sovereignty by Allah's blessing and by ruling in his name; laws and customs were illegitimate unless based on sacred Islamic texts. Jahiliyyah, the state in which Qutb argued societies limped on before being ruled by sharia, bestowed sovereignty on the people, and this was blasphemy.

Last but by no means least, Ibn Taymiyyah's concept of long-term jihad played a central role in Sayyid Qutb's worldview. To enable the rule of God on Earth and to uphold it in the long run, Qutb argued that jihad must be promoted—both as a way of life and as every Muslim's duty, practically the sixth pillar of Islam.

Sayyid Qutb's ideas, although conservative and fundamentalist, were also revolutionary in some ways. In eras before his, Islamic scholars sometimes accepted despotic and decadent rulers to keep civil war at bay. State authorities were to be upheld, they emphasized, deeming jihad an option only in particular contexts, declared by rulers when Muslim lands were under attack or new ones had to be conquered. Qutb, in contrast, privatized jihad, claiming it fell to the faithful to depose illegitimate rulers whose states were anything less than theocratic, coming together and declaring jihad for themselves.

Not least because of ideas like these and his subsequent role in the conspiracy against Nasser, Qutb was executed in 1966—yet his manuscripts continued spreading like wildfire, serving as manuals of terror for Islamist groups like Harkat-ul-Jihad al-Islami, al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya, and al-Qaeda.

Three years before being elected president of Egypt, Mohamed Morsi said of Sayyid Qutb in an interview aired on the Egyptian TV channel al-Fara'een on August 13, 2009, "I have read his work and rediscovered the true Islam in it." Most of the Muslim Brother-

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hood's leaders today are part of its Qutbist wing, the organization's most powerful and influential internal faction, and are devoted to Qutb's philosophy of jihad. Its rivals include the group's Salafist and Azharite wings, the latter being graduates of the religious University of al-Azhar, as well as the so-called reformist wing—yet when the Brotherhood took power in Egypt, only the Qutbists managed to make their mark.

CHAPTER 4

FROM MY STRUGGLE (MEIN KAMPF) TO OUR STRUGGLE— ARABIA AND ANTI-SEMITISM

One of Anton Chekhov's short stories follows two patients staying in the same ward who hate each other with a passion. Not a day goes by without them squabbling, until one day the nurse informs one of them of the other's death, expecting him to cavort around the room in fits of joy. Instead, she finds him lying dead on the hospital floor the next day. The patient's feud with his rival had made his life meaningful, and after the other man's death it no longer meant anything: the two could never live side by side, nor could the one go on without the other. At least from the Muslim point of view, Chekhov's story could serve as an exaggerated account of Jewish-Islamic relations.

Nowhere has anti-Semitism's impact been more profound than in the Arab world. Its modern form can be traced back to the founding of Israel and the various Arab military conflicts with the Jewish state that followed, as well as to Nazi propaganda that found sympathetic Arab ears during the Second World War. Arab anti-Semitism today owes more to *Mein Kampf* than to the Qur'an, Nazism's depictions of Jews having made their mark in the Arab world long before Israel became a state. Arabs laboring under the

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same fixed sense of abjection as Hitler's German supporters lauded his paranoid fantasies of a worldwide Jewish conspiracy, and both *Mein Kampf* and *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*—banned in much of the world, and rightly so—have been bestsellers for decades in Arab states. On its official website today, Hamas even displays quotations from *The Protocols*, as if the anti-Jewish pamphlet in question, an uncontested forgery, actually served as the basis of a conspiracy by world Jewry.

At the same time, we might do well to step back and ask: is Arab anti-Semitism really such a modern phenomenon, or are its historical roots much deeper?

Hatred of Jews always had far more to do with Muslim self-perception than with Jews themselves, as is the case with all varieties of anti-Semitism, which only came to poisonous fruition in Germany once the public's self-image was severely wounded. Yet Arabs have an altogether different relationship with Jews from that of the Nazis: the two peoples are more alike by far than either will admit, having moved in opposite directions during the last two centuries—specifically, in the case of Arabs, backward.

Although resentment has stirred repeatedly throughout Islamic history, Muslims and Jews also got along from time to time. Despite distinct historical tensions, no genuine theology of anti-Jewish hatred ever took hold in Islam the way it did in Christianity. Christians had Jews to blame for the killing of Jesus, and the Middle Ages lent European anti-Semitism a further pretext: moneylending and commerce were both frowned upon by Christians, making them the preserve of Jews, who were nonetheless banned from joining crafters' guilds. Neither presented a problem for Arabs, in whose religion Jesus's role was minor and who were

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prolific traders and far from squeamish in matters of finance or merchandise. Competing claims on territory and ultimate truth lay at the heart of Muslim-Jewish conflict, with Muslims fighting tooth and nail to assert their ownership of both.

Never aspiring to convert others, Jews remained a small people even as Muslims conquered everywhere from Andalusia to Persia in just a century of conquest. Until the sixteenth century, 95 percent of all Jews lived within this region, with repeated waves of Jewish migration to the Arab world having taken place since the pre-Islamic era and many of Andalusia's Jews emigrating to Egypt and North Africa in the late fifteenth century after Christian forces retook their home. There they were welcomed with open arms, as the Ottoman Empire outright encouraged Jews to move to Istanbul and Thessaloniki. Later, in the first half of the twentieth century, tens of thousands of Jews fled European anti-Semitism, settling in Palestine. This time, however, they were to find themselves unwelcome. With the Islamic caliphate's demise, an unbridled Muslim hatred for Jews had reared its head—and to this day, the same hatred has yet to be reined in.

The enmity between Muslims and Jews is a family feud, rooted in Abraham's disputed legacy and the sovereignty of each school of monotheism. After the Temple at Jerusalem's destruction at Roman hands in 70 CE, many of Palestine's Hebrews had left, establishing themselves in the Arab city of Yathrib, renamed Medina by Muhammad five centuries later. The first century's pre-Islamic Arabs never deemed these Jewish settlers a threat—indeed, Medina's Jews lived side by side with Arab polytheists for a long period of peace, dealing in arms, wine, and instruments and contributing in no small part to the city's flowering nightlife. Favoring

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neutrality in the event of war, they avoided taking sides in intra-Arab disputes, even mediating in occasional conflicts over water sources and land.

Then Muhammad arrived.

As detailed above, the Prophet spurred a radical movement, shifting in time from an admirer of Jewish customs and convictions to a committed enemy of Judaism, ordering whole tribes annihilated. Muhammad never saw his conflict with Jews as a one-off historical episode, indeed, saying so would have undermined his leadership and politics alike. Instead, he viewed it as part of a continual—if not eternal—struggle for which his people were destined, one that would only be won for good in the end times. “The [last] hour will not be established until you fight with the Jews,” Muhammad reportedly told his followers, “and the stone behind which a Jew will be hiding will say, ‘O Muslim! There is a Jew hiding behind me, so kill him.’”¹

This prophecy seems to have foreshadowed many modern Islamists’ fantasies of mass extermination: in their eyes, the struggle against Jews is nothing less than a divine mission. Neither peace accords nor occupied territories’ release is reason enough for them to call off their war with Jews, whom they consider backstabbers for all eternity. This struggle is part of their God’s plan: victory being an impossibility without extermination of all Jews.

After Muhammad’s death and the Islamic conquests that followed, pragmatism came to shape Muslim relations with heretics again. Muslim conquerors relied on Christians’ and Jews’ cooperation, many of them doctors, manual laborers, and translators that Islam’s new empire urgently needed. During the Abbasid Caliphate’s so-called golden age, primarily between the ninth and elev-

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enth centuries, both cultures drew on the other's thought, with many Jews making names for themselves as advisors to caliphs, scholars, poets, and philosophers, informing Muslim philosophy in their turn. When part-polemic texts composed in poetry contests by Jews, Christians, and Muslims at the caliph's palace in Baghdad's gained public visibility, they spurred neither mass protests nor pogroms. To witness the last thousand years of the Islamic world's development, one need only compare the tolerance of ninth-century Muslims with the views of their twenty-first-century counterparts: I need only allude to Denmark's Muhammad cartoons and the consequences of their publication.

Jewish and Arab cultures influenced and augmented each other, with the Torah translated into Arabic and disputes with Islamic theologians and philosophers prompting a renaissance in Jewish thought. The nineteenth century would arrive before Arabia's influence on Judaism ran dry, the Jewish religion being impacted more by European culture from then on.

THE MYTH OF ANDALUSIA

Despite being only a recent invention, a romantic legend had sprung up around peaceful Jewish and Muslim coexistence in Andalusia.² Appalled at mounting European anti-Semitism around the turn of the nineteenth century, Jewish intellectuals sought historical evidence their people could live side by side with adherents of other faiths, chancing upon the history of Andalusia and romanticizing its glory days. Muslims, Christians, and Jews in the region had, they maintained, lived together eight hundred years as equals and in peace, spawning an oasis of high culture and tolerance.

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In Andalusia as in ninth-century Baghdad, sharia law went unenforced; alcohol was consumed in public; and song, dance, and erotic poetry were parts of everyday life. Jews held senior public offices, working in politics and the military. In the eleventh century, the Jewish poet and theologian Samuel ibn Naghrillah became grand vizier—head of government, so to speak—at the Berber monarch's palace in Granada. When Ibn Naghrillah was also named supreme commander of the military, resistance surfaced among Andalusia's Muslim theologians, with otherwise-moderate cleric Ibn Hazm deeming Ibn Naghrillah's appointment a threat to Islam's power in the Iberian Peninsula. His objections found an especially sympathetic audience in Muslim migrants from North Africa, followers by and large of Ibn Hanbal's fundamentalist theology—a migrant populace that railed against Jews and Christians alike, as well as against Muslims who failed to obey sharia.

When Samuel ibn Naghrillah's son Joseph became grand vizier after his death, Muslim theologians demanded the public depose him through violence; incensed religious zealots raged into Granada's Jewish quarter, destroying people's homes and killing every Jew they saw. Four thousand Jews lost their lives in the course of this pogrom, among them Grand Vizier Joseph ibn Naghrillah.

In the twelfth century, fundamentalist Almohads conquered broad stretches of Andalusia, allowing Muslim Berbers to effect great changes in a supposed oasis of prosperous tolerance, banning music, dancing, and public consumption of alcohol. *Dhimmi* laws Muhammad had introduced to govern coexistence with non-Muslims were tightened: while Christians and Jews were granted the same religious freedom they always had been, they were now forbidden to ride horses, build overly tall houses, or assume key

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offices, and they were required to wear symbols on their clothing indicating their religion. This clampdown led many Jews and Christians to convert to Islam.

Philosophy was declared tantamount to blasphemy and penalized. In Córdoba, officials burned books containing the works of historic philosopher Ibn Rushd (Averroës). Averroës was one scholar responsible for annotating Aristotle's chief works—which aided the advent of Christian scholasticism—and he was exiled as a heretic by orthodox Andalusian Islamic scholars. The same fate befell Jewish philosopher Mosheh ben Maimon, who was forced to flee enraged Muslims first to Fes and later to Cairo. Many other Andalusian Jews fled as he did, and still others were forced to convert to Islam.

Across the Mediterranean Sea at almost the exact same time, Muslims were battling crusading forces. Previously, Jerusalem had been a minor city with no real role in Islamic history, but once Christian conquerors captured it, executing scores of Muslims and Jews, the city became a sudden focal point symbolic of the struggle against Islam's enemies. Legends were unearthed to emphasize the holiness of the struggle against Christians, among them the Prophet Muhammad's overnight trek from Mecca to Jerusalem. As history ran its course, Islam's enemies changed, but the myth of Jerusalem remained.

By the late fifteenth century, the Reconquista had mostly run its course, almost all of Andalusia's Muslim enclaves had been recaptured by Christians, and in 1480 the mass expatriation of the region's Jews and Muslims began—as did the Inquisition's targeting of converts. From 1492 to 1526, Andalusia remained almost entirely Jew- and Muslim-free, both groups having turned tail

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and fled. Spanish Jews were welcomed with open arms in North Africa, where they enjoyed a favorable reputation thanks to their skills and knowledge, while others settled in the Ottoman Empire. While Jewish doctors, scholars, and financiers played vital roles at the sultan's palace, other Jews remained second-class citizens—only in the mid-nineteenth century were the empire's *dhimmi* laws repealed, and even then parity only existed on paper. In post-revolutionary France, by contrast, Jews were already recognized as citizens of equal worth.

As the Ottoman Empire's strength waned by the day, whole territories fell to the might of France and Britain: North Africa slipped into French colonial hands, while Egypt, Sudan, Iraq, and Palestine were in Britain's. Arabs found themselves in the death grip of triumphant Europeans, and, seeing a chance for emancipation and equal citizenship in its Enlightenment, Jews poured into Europe in great numbers as these events unfolded. Muslims, meanwhile, sensed only a threat to their religious identity, walling themselves off once again.

The Andalusia of popular myth, a refuge of tolerance and cultural cross-pollination between Jews and Arabs, endured only as long as Arab conquerors' power went unchallenged. For a time, indeed a lengthy one, it served Muslims' economic interest for Jews and Christians to retain their own faith, paying higher taxes than did Muslims—even four centuries after the Islamic conquest of Egypt and Syria, 60 percent of their citizens kept Christian beliefs—but in the end, once the Islamic world was overrun first by crusading forces and then by Mongol ones, its caliphate collapsed in ruins and periods of dramatic regress followed. Their backs against the wall, followers of Islam lashed out.

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ZIONISTS, ISLAMISTS, AND ARAB NATIONALISTS

The wave of nationalism that gathered speed in the late nineteenth century washed over the Arab world as much as Europe, spawning two movements that would become mortal enemies in the twentieth, leaving their mark on the Middle East's fate in the twenty-first. One was Zionism—the other, pan-Arabism. Both movements sprang from a sense of oppression, displaying nationalist influences and pursuing liberation from something or other.

Jewish nationalists hoped to escape mounting anti-Semitism in Europe, founding an independent nation-state for Jews. Arab nationalists, meanwhile, hoped to shake off the yoke of European colonial rule, establishing a single Arab state as Otto von Bismarck had established the German Empire in 1871. Modern Islamists came upon the scene in no time at all, insisting that a state for the world's Muslims must be ruled by sharia.

The Middle East was to serve as the battleground where these two movements came to blows. Arabs, from their own point of view, suffered defeat after humiliating defeat on their own soil: for the first time in history, Jews were their victorious rivals rather than simply their peers—a shock, indeed, a wound that still smarts to this day.

Even before Israel was founded, Zionists' organization and effectiveness impressed Arabs as much as it intimidated them. Beginning outside the Middle East, thus at a disadvantage, it remains an enticing question how Zionists succeeded at constructing a working democracy while contemporary Arab attempts failed.

Arab nationalists built their movement on myths and cults of personality, while Zionists deployed on multiple fronts. Zionist

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thought emerged both in the writings of Orthodox Jews like Nathan Birnbaum and those of secular commentators like Theodor Herzl; and Zionist conferences played host to journalists and lawyers, students and established minds, men and women, emphasizing from the outset the diversity of the state it hoped to found. In Egypt, Syria, Turkey, and Iran, meanwhile, nationalist discourse was shaped solely by men who styled themselves as enlightened thought leaders, mostly from the Western academy.

The movement for Jewish nationalism unfolded on two planes. First, under the banner of political Zionism, it made its way onto the global political agenda through contact with politicians from powerful states, managing to convince not just Austria-Hungary, Germany, France, and Great Britain but also the Ottoman Empire that the Jewish people had a right to a nation-state. (Herzl himself went so far as to visit the caliph himself in Istanbul, hoping to talk him into offering Jews a stretch of Palestinian land.) Second, there was practical Zionism, overseeing Jewish emigration to Palestine and founding *kibbutzim* (collective agricultural communities in Israel) where socialist ideas were put to work. Additionally and crucially, a current of cultural Zionism ensured that the Enlightenment's principles were imported to Palestine alongside Jewish customs.

Intellectuals, farmers, workers, and guerillas gathered in Palestine, and when David Ben-Gurion declared Israel's independence in May 1948, the world bowed to its sovereignty. Earlier, Ben-Gurion had ordered the sinking of a ship at sea on which underground fighters planned to smuggle arms into the country, yet despite numerous conflicts and ongoing threats from neighboring Arab states, a democratic constitution—the region's first—was

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passed with popular support. Israel successfully became a melting pot where migrant Jews from all corners of the world converged, while early discrimination against African and Asian Jews eased up over time.

The quest for Arab unity, conversely, petered out. From the outset it had lacked a clear ideology beyond opposition to Israel, whose existence came to serve as a continual pretext for Arab leaders' rearmament and consolidation of what power they had. ("No voice is to be raised about the din of battle," Egypt's President Nasser once declared, attempting to silence pacifist critics.) Arab sovereigns grew into unimpeachable despots, oppressing minorities alongside political opponents, hamstringing every push for social change, and engineering a perfect breeding ground for anti-Semitism and Islamist fundamentalism alike. Neither is a modern phenomenon; indeed, to draw a line from Abraham's era to our own is to see both revealed, in Tunisian-French historian Abdelwahab Meddeb's words, for the "true Islamic sickness" they are.

THE MUFTI AND THE MASTERMIND: ANTI-SEMITISM ON THE RISE

In 1934 a fearsome massacre of Jews took place in Constantine, Algeria. Anti-Semitic comments by the city's French mayor—at the time, France ruled all northern Algeria—emboldened local Arabs to set upon the Jewish populace. The pogrom that resulted came as a turning point for Arab Jews as well as their European counterparts, as most donned Western clothes from this point on, and those with French citizenship migrated to Paris. Even as they did so, many Jews were deserting Europe for the Middle East. Tens

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of thousands flocked to Palestine each year after National Socialists took power in Germany.

Both Arab nationalists and Islamists saw a chance to raise their own profile in the struggle against Zionism, with Syrian Salafist Rashid Rida, Hassan al-Banna's foremost mentor, referring to a worldwide Jewish conspiracy. *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* had been translated into Arabic not long before, and they were taken as open-and-shut proof of Jews' intentions. In the years after 1929, Amin al-Husseini, grand mufti of Jerusalem, fanned the flames of anti-Jewish resentment, calling an Islamic congress there when another massacre followed in Palestinian Hebron. It was at al-Husseini's congress that the first demands were made for a Palestine free of Jews, and contacting Hitler was only the next logical step.

Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood quickly found that anti-Jewish pot-stirring appealed to both the public and their country's king. Adorning his speeches and articles with lines from the Prophet, Hassan al-Banna unearthed Muhammad's every word against Jews, reviving the legend of a "last battle" against them, with Hitler the new messiah. Translating parts of *Mein Kampf* and doing all they could to maximize public hatred of Jews, religious zealots waged a propaganda war, and in 1937 a mass Arab revolt against both Jews and British rule began. Britain reacted violently, laying waste to the then-Palestinian city of Jaffa, suppressing the revolt and forcing the entire Arab vanguard to flee.

Even the grand mufti himself took flight, landing in Berlin four years later, after several stops. From then on, al-Husseini recruited jihadists to Hitler's side; Nazis even provided an Arabic-language radio station he used to broadcast toxic anti-Semitic propaganda across the Arab world. Informed by Heinrich Himmler that three

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million Jews had been killed and that the Final Solution was at hand, the mufti shared the good news with his Arab listeners while on air, opting not to betray the details but noting the prospect of a twin “Final Solution” in Palestine.³

Shortly thereafter, the Muslim Brotherhood held a mass anti-Semitic rally in Cairo, spurring attacks on Jews in public streets and the ransacking of Jewish businesses. The following year, pogroms were carried out in Baghdad. “Those foreign immigrants the Zionists,” the mufti had declared years earlier. “We shall kill them to the last man. Only the sword can decide our nation’s destiny.”⁴

The United Nations passed a resolution in 1947, mandating partition of Palestine. While Jews rejoiced, Arabs prepared for a conflict some feared they may lose, with Palestinian Arabs and Arab Jews alike paying the price, driven out of Egypt, Iraq, Morocco, and Algeria. Arab Jews found new homes either in Europe or in Israel, granted full citizenship for the first time in history, while in various Arab states, Palestinians arrived as refugees, treated from then on as second-class citizens. Ironically, Arab anti-Semitism would define their lives more than anyone’s.

Then, in 1950, Sayyid Qutb—mastermind of the Muslim Brotherhood—produced one of the sacred texts of Islamic anti-Semitism, his book *Our Struggle against the Jews*. In its pages, Qutb draws on the established topos of Jews conspiring against Islam, resisting it with all their resolve throughout history. “Today’s Jews resemble their forebears in Prophet Muhammad’s time,” Qutb writes, “showing the same hostility they displayed at the founding of the state of Medina, attacking the Muslim community that served as its backbone at the earliest opportunity. The Jews practiced deception, attacking the first Muslims with

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all their duplicity, and so in their evil they went about turning Muslims from the Qur'an and their true religion. Only bloodshed, violence and evil of the basest sort can be expected of such creatures, who kill, massacre and defame the Prophet. . . . Allah sent us Hitler to triumph over them, and may send others too to show the Jews the terrible ways of retribution. In doing so, he will fulfill a plainspoken promise.”⁵

Across the Arab world, hatred of Jews came to be a core part of history lessons and nationalist conditioning alike. Later, satellite channels like Al-Manar, Al Aqsa TV, and Al Jazeera would broadcast their own Jew-baiting messages around the globe. Even children's programming promotes anti-Semitic stereotypes, evoking legends of martyrdom as well as militarist propaganda.

If young Palestinians take issue with Israel today, their objections are understandable: for one thing, the building of Israeli settlements has had a direct impact on their lives. Less understandable is the mounting anti-Semitism of young Muslims whose daily lives have little to do with conflicts in the Middle East. When Moroccans in Casablanca, Pakistanis in London, Tunisians in Berlin, Somalis in Copenhagen, and Lebanese residents of Malmö all nurse the same anti-Semitic views, fantasizing about Jews' mass extermination, Arab-Israeli conflicts seem scant explanation.

The problem exists throughout the Islamic world, infecting whole generations with anti-Jewish as well as anti-Western hatred: Muslims in all parts of the world who delight in reading *Mein Kampf* and *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, yet have no idea who Hume, Kant, or Spinoza were, have missed the point of reading anything. When Muslim fanatics in Taliban dress are unafraid to preach sermons of hate in Frankfurt's streets, but a rabbi

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in Berlin is assaulted simply for wearing a kippah, the whole of Europe has a problem—and when “Muslim patrols” control entire boroughs of London, yet Jews flee the Swedish town of Malmö, social cohesion is imperiled in all corners of the continent. Even after the bloody attacks against a synagogue in Brussels in 2014, a Jewish supermarket in Paris, and a synagogue in Copenhagen in 2015, Muslim communities still refuse to admit to a specific Islamic anti-Semitism.

This anti-Semitism is one symptom of an ancient disease, outbreaks of which come and go over time. It persists today not just due to Muslims’ critically infirm self-image, but also as a result of many Europeans’ indifference, who seem either unwilling or unable to oppose it outright.

FOREIGN AT HOME: AN ASIDE ON LIFE FOR EGYPT’S COPTS

The date is January 25, 2012, first anniversary of the revolution that deposed Egyptian dictator Hosni Mubarak. Samir has been up since 4 a.m. In his neighborhood, Cairo’s southwestern Muqattam, all remains dark, with no trace of moonlight to be seen. Samir is nineteen, tired, and angry. “I’m a Copt,” he tells me defiantly. “Just because I haul trash around, it doesn’t mean I’m trash.” Then he starts his eight-mile walk to work.

A year ago, Samir took this same route to join demonstrators in Tahrir Square. Today as he wanders the capital collecting refuse, the square is in his thoughts again. His job is one frowned upon by Muslims, thus traditionally reserved for Copts, a Christian denomination who make up 6 to 10 percent of Egypt’s populace. Coptic

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farmers used to feed their livestock leftovers from discarded shopping bags, but two years back this practice met a sudden end.

On the pretext of a swine flu outbreak, Islamists ordered all of southern Cairo's animals slaughtered. Samir is convinced that for the fanatics responsible, this was never just a case of disease control—indeed that their main aim was punishing “unbelievers.” Mubarak's fall did nothing to end discrimination against his people, he tells me. On the contrary: Copts have it worse today than ever. Consequently, Samir is boycotting festivities in celebration of the year since the revolution.

Many of his fellow Copts have now left the country. “I'm not rich,” he comments. “I can't afford to leave. But anyway, I want to stay. I love this country—these days I just can't bear the looks I sometimes get when Muslims see a cross tattooed on my hand.” Samir knows not all Muslims, some of whom are his friends, look down on Copts. “Plenty of them came to demonstrate outside the TV center with us on October 9, 2011, but they're still a minority in the end.”

This was the day Cairo's Copts tried to demand their rights as a religious group. When Samir tried to pass the barricade surrounding the state broadcasting center, a soldier in the Egyptian army greeted him warmly. It was a trap: beyond the barrier, two more soldiers welcomed him, only to take a swing at him. Samir witnessed a different group of Christians crushed under an army tank, one man cut in half under its tracks while trying to save his wife. Thirty or so Copts were killed, and hundreds sustained injuries.

What shocked Samir was never the soldiers' brutality—they killed followers of Islam, he says, with equal indifference—but

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how many Muslims helped them surround his group of protesting Copts. “It wasn’t just hostility I saw in their eyes,” he says. “It was unadulterated hatred.” Two Muslim strangers kicked him over and over, ultimately picking him up from the ground and throwing him in the Nile.

Only six months beforehand, Copts and Muslims held peaceful demonstrations side by side, Copts in Tahrir Square forming a human chain around praying Muslims in one widely publicized scene while armed and mounted Mubarak supporters attacked them. Later, Muslim youths would return the favor, guarding Christians at a service. Briefly, it seemed revolution had bridged the gulf hewn by religion, but mere weeks afterward clashes erupted between Muslims and Copts in Alexandria. This outbreak of violence was a knee-jerk response to military smear campaigns targeting Copts in the state-run media: that the hateful tirades in question found sympathetic ears was a result, Samir suggests, of misguided education policies. In Egypt’s schools, hardly anything is taught about the country’s Copts or their history, and in any event, implacable Islamist dogma would only deny heretics’ humanity.

Though less than optimistic about Egypt’s future, Samir wants to do all he can. Hoping to catch up on his studies and pass his exams but with no time for school, he studies at home after work instead. In the future, he aspires to study business or law at university—perhaps then, Egypt’s people will show him more respect. “But even if I end up with a high-flying job,” he asks ruefully, “what can I do about the cross on my hand?”

All over the Islamic world, not just in Egypt, Christians face a life of persecution. In modern-day Iraq, extinction threatens one of the world’s oldest Christian communities as Islamists attack, setting

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churches ablaze for no reason at all. Hardly a Christmas passes without one being blown sky high or members of the Christian faith attacked. In December 2013, an exploding car bomb killed thirty-five Christians on their way out of church after a service, and one of YouTube's most brutal videos shows two Islamists holding up a truck in an Iraqi street, asking the driver and both passengers their religion. Shaking with fear, they claim to be Muslims and are made to get out. One of the Islamists questions them about the Muslim morning prayer ritual, forcing them to their knees when they fail to answer and mowing them down with a machine gun. In February 2015, twenty-one Christian Copts who were guest workers in Libya were captured and slain by ISIS. Whenever and wherever people are murdered for their faith or background, fascism is at work.

It would be wrong to lump together all the world's Muslims, most of whom are as shocked as anyone by executions like these—but the number caught up from birth in hatred and persecution of dissidents and heretics is not to be underestimated. More and more of today's Muslims deny that Christians—being unbelievers—have the right to exist at all, while more and more Arab Christians are forced to flee Arabia just as its Jews once were. Few in the region recognize this as the form of cultural self-harm it is. The obsessive desire to cleanse both the public and private spheres of all things un-Islamic has spurred cultural decline, as people entrenched in religion and a tribal culture clearly archaic today wall themselves in. Walls of this kind make perfect palisades for dictators, as well as perfect cages for their people.

CHAPTER 5

FROM GUTENBERG TO ZUCKERBERG— CULTURAL MONOPOLY AND THE DICTATORSHIP OF ISLAM

Far from developing in a vacuum, Islam built on Jewish and Christian myths and narratives in its early history. Likewise, medieval Arab culture thrived on curiosity; its people, thirsting for knowledge, borrowed both the neighboring Persia's governmental system and Byzantium's military structure. From Baghdad to Damascus, Cairo to Córdoba, Arabs reaped all the benefits of cultural exchange.

Islam proved adaptable in its early days, opposing neither science nor free inquiry. In prosperous periods, Muslim rulers tolerated alternative lifestyles and schools of religious thought, exerting minimal control over their subjects' thoughts. This free-and-easy attitude to dissent brought both the Arab and wider Islamic world strength and prosperity lasting far into the Middle Ages. But when crises hit, things changed. During periods of weakness, Islam was raised to the fore as the sole source of identity; dissidents and heretics were put under distinct pressure; and efforts were made to eradicate all things un-Islamic. Just as Islam's initial tolerance hastened its imperial power, this isolationism would foster its decay and eventual decline.

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In many parts of today's Muslim world, this pattern is ignored, the accepted theory stating that Islam alone spawned a cultured civilization among warring nomads. Many modern Muslims cite this notion as the reason to fight all forms of secularization, claiming the advanced culture Islam forged gave formerly uneducated Arabs the edge over Europe in all fields of medieval thought—ignoring that, as a belief system, Islam had next to nothing to do with Arabia's heyday.

Arab science and philosophy profited from Persian, Christian, and Greek influences, subjects in newly conquered regions preserving their own cultures' ideas. As long as the role of sharia remained negligible, as in Baghdad and Andalusia during the ninth and tenth centuries, different religions and cultures did more than live side by side, intermingling to an extent, and spurring a mass drive for modernization across the Middle East—they created a vibrant process propelled largely by non-Arabs like Avicenna, al-Farabi, Muhammad ibn Musa al-Khwarizmi, John of Damascus, Mosheh ben Maimon (Maimonides), and Ibn Rushd (Averroës).

Islam's new overlords were self-assured enough not to fear the touch of heretics, putting their expertise to use by integrating other cultures' intellectual canons into their own, proliferating works from antiquity in Arabic and naming the ancient Greeks *al-qudama'a*, "the forebears." Arab conquerors encountered erudite, Hellenized Christians and Jews, disputing the nature of God and creation of the world with them. The *kalam* theological tradition grew out of these debates and shaped later Arab philosophy in turn. It was agreed that rational and metaphysical truth were not to be zero-sum competitors, a view that would appear later in European scholarship.

At later points, freedoms of thought and action were curtailed

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whenever scholars sensed an outside threat, insisting on sharia's implementation. Their demands led not just to oppression and persecution of minorities, but also to intellectual stagnation. To fill the void, the core ideas of Islam—the Qur'an as unadulterated divine writ, its status as a legal document, Islam's supposed universality, and jihad as a duty to God—were reasserted and reemphasized. The further from their prophet's era Muslims found themselves, the more sacrosanct the Qur'an became, with believers following scripture to the letter, leaving no room for interpretation.

The Crusades, as well as the later Mongol invasion and sacking of Baghdad, prompted Muslims to take a hard line against Christians and Jews alike. Baghdad had functioned as a den of permissiveness where drinking, song, and dance—indeed heresy itself—were accepted, so many blamed the abandonment of Islamic values for these defeats, looking to godlessness for an explanation instead of military error.

Based on the principle of *fiqh*—understanding—in name only, Islamic theology narrowed and stagnated. The new mentality of the faithful insisted the Qur'an contained the sum of all knowledge, cutting Muslims off from human thought elsewhere in the world. Their faith was to be purified of unclean foreign influences, and the demonization of philosophy and science ensued, as well as the oppression of minorities and women. The death of Muslim cultural exchange with non-Muslim thinkers sapped their society's momentum, and one additional factor—the discovery of a seafaring route around the Cape of Good Hope by Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama in 1498—helped diminish the Middle East's global relevance, prompting traders to avoid the region. As a result, new ideas from around the world struggled to find their way in.

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Changes in education helped spell the end of the Islamic golden age, in whose heyday madrasas had taught mathematics, philosophy, and medicine alongside the Qur'an, fueling innovations and discoveries. Before and after the sack of Baghdad, Islam's empire crumbled into smaller caliphates that fought among themselves—the Seljuqs, Fatimids, and Abbasids, to name a few, later joined by the Mamelukes and Safavids. Rulers guarded their own power at great financial cost by surrounding themselves with mercenaries and warlords, while funds that had once poured into education ran dry. Because some regents rewarded their lieutenants with jurisdiction over parts of cities, key opportunities to exert their own influence slipped through their fingers as warlords favored the building of mosques and madrasas where science and philosophy no longer played a role, thus permitting only religious instruction. Schoolmasters were required to present themselves as flawless servants of Islam; they were forced to flee or have their madrasas abolished if they failed. Obedience and total loyalty to the faith were the new watchwords, supplanting knowledge and free inquiry, and from this point on education meant nothing more than childhood religious indoctrination.

In the end, rote learning and internalization of views divorced from reality—both about Muslims and the wider world—cata-pulted the Islamic world into isolation. Most Arab states' core pedagogy to this day, incidentally, resembles this repeat-after-me approach, the Qur'an serving as the fount of all human knowledge.

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THE MORTAL SINS OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

Muslims faced with their own history of cultural decline often hold Christian conquerors to blame; history books say hardly a word about Mongol aggression or the obliteration of Baghdad, which were far more devastating assaults on Arab intellectual culture. In 1258, Central Asian forces seized the contents of all of Baghdad's libraries, casting every last book into the Euphrates. Scholars and intellectuals were put to death, skilled workers abducted and shipped back to Central Asia—yet children in Arabia's schools today are taught more about conflicts over Jerusalem and the wickedness of the crusaders. This is due to the fact that the Mongols, of course, would ultimately convert to Islam, so their conquests tend to be viewed retroactively through the lens of jihadism and the propagation of Islam; it also works to the advantage of the Mongols that they don't retain an empire today.

By contrast, today's Europeans are viewed as descendants of the crusaders, links in a lengthy chain of anti-Muslim animus in the West. European colonists are said to have arrived when the Crusades ended, exploiting the Islamic world and hastening its decline—but between the end of the Crusades in the thirteenth century and Napoleon Bonaparte's 1798 conquest of Egypt, 507 years went by, during which time the West barely hindered any of the Islamic world's innumerable expansions. What did the Islamic world do during this time to spur the glaring intellectual stagnation that its own history displays?

Looking to history once again, the fall of both Baghdad and Andalusia's fractious Muslim empire led Turks to rise as the next major power, converting to Islam and forming the Ottoman Empire,

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capturing Constantinople—heart of the Byzantine Empire—in one of many victorious conquests. Twice, in 1529 and 1683, the Ottomans reached Vienna's gates, declaring their military campaigns to serve the sole cause of propagating Islam. (This may explain the Turks' eagerness to expand in Europe's direction.) By this point, however, the Middle East had been isolated long enough for the Turks to invade, slaying their fellow Muslims and conquering Syria in 1516, with Egypt falling the following year, and the Ottomans seizing control of the entire region. Four centuries of Ottoman rule from modern Morocco to the coast of the Persian Gulf only sealed off the Arab crescent's culture further from that of neighboring Europe, as triumphant Turks promoted even more blinkered and conservative ideologies. In particular, Turkish harem culture strengthened the Arab tribal tradition of gender apartheid, entrenching an inhuman view of women.

The Ottomans may have had Europe at a disadvantage during their glory days, but by closing themselves off from outside influences they made their empire a clay-footed giant. Come the fifteenth century, the German Johannes Gutenberg presented humanity with an invention that would change the world: the printing press. His creation shattered both the Catholic Church's monopoly on learning and the ruling classes' privatization of European thought while enabling public access to it. Without mass production's new possibilities, Martin Luther's Bible and his Ninety-Five Theses could never have made the impact they did. The printing press raised levels of public literacy and introduced readers all over Europe to the ideas of David Hume, Immanuel Kant, René Descartes, and other Enlightenment thinkers. Transmitted in their own languages as well as in Latin, knowledge was within reach for all the conti-

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ment's people—a plot twist without which revolutions in Western thought and (later) industry would have been inconceivable.

Despite mounting demands in the Ottoman Empire for the Gutenberg machine's importation to Istanbul, religious scholars who held sway there objected vehemently, arguing that the machine may lead to distortions of the Qur'an.¹ Mass production would have cost them control of their holy book's contents, and so for over three centuries, the Islamic world was spared the invention of the printing press, along with its societal effects. While one arrived in Istanbul in 1729, it was put to work solely in the sultan's internal offices by his administration. Another traveled to Cairo with Napoleon in 1798, only for the scholars of al-Azhar to blast it as a satanic device. While the French were still unloading its printing plates in Alexandria's harbor of Abu Qir, religious zealots attacked, smashing them to smithereens.

Nowhere is the cultural chasm between Europe and the Islamic world more glaring than in their respective relationship with the printing press. While one took advantage of its invention, piercing the clergy's religious paternalism and cultural monopoly and establishing a new culture of critical thinking, the other—fearing the loss of its religious identity and corruption of its holy texts—lambasted it as satanic. In an atmosphere of such cultural isolation, the dictatorship of Islam only tightened its grip.

Europe made the step from belief to thought, replacing metaphysics with epistemology. While the Enlightenment's ideas and technological innovations spurred lasting industrial and intellectual revolutions throughout eighteenth-century Europe, thoroughly transforming the "Occident" in mere decades, lethargy and superstition reigned in the Middle East.

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ABD AL-WAHHAB AND “RENEWAL”

As far-reaching events like these unfolded to the north, one man set out to spur his own “reforms” in Arab thought. Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703–1792), founder of the Wahhabist movement, longed to see all things un-Islamic purged from everyday life and culture. Following the letter of the Qur’an, he insisted, made combatting unbelievers—and even Muslim mystics—mandatory. Today it rings not a little ironic that he and his followers spoke of a mission of *tajdid*—that is, “renewal.”

Al-Wahhab based his ideas on Muhammad’s promise that every hundred years, Allah would send Muslims a *mujaddid* to renew the faith—renewal in this case denoting a return to first principles. Egypt’s ruler Muhammad Ali attempted to crush Wahhabism at the start of the nineteenth century, deeming it an obstacle to his modernization drive, only to be hamstrung by the English. The British Crown and the Saudi family banded together to create in many ways an unholy alliance that survives to this day.

Modern Wahhabists remain key supporters of the Saudi royal family and are permitted to regulate education and religious instruction of Saudi Arabia’s children in return for legitimizing the monarchy’s power. As moral guardians of the nation, they also patrol its streets, arresting “sinners”—men found outside at prayer or women whose veils appear an inch askew.

In most Islamic states, religious officials perform the same function in lesser forms, ensuring that the ruling class’s authority remains unquestioned and policing the country’s educational canon and treatment of young people as they see fit. Rewriting history, they exalt Islam and demonize its enemies, rejecting all attempts to broaden their

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nations' intellectual horizons and preserving their own monopoly on cultural thought; warning the public never to cease in its struggle against faraway threats, they ensure the specter of the external enemy is ever-present in both school textbooks and the media.

In the wake of September 11, 2001, several Arab states' Western allies pressed them to ensure their own schools' textbooks no longer stoked hatred against heretics or the West. In a surprising act of gestural politics, certain countries involved—principally Egypt and Saudi Arabia—removed teaching materials from schools whose contents unmistakably incited hatred, adding new passages in their place that called for nations of the world to coexist in peace. Ultimately it was to prove a short-sighted measure, since the textbooks—based as they were on edicts of the Prophet and the Qur'an—remained much the same in all other respects.

The same near-schizoid inconsistency appears all over the Islamic world, and not just in textbooks. The problem is philosophical as much as factual, tied inextricably to Islam's partition of the world into believers and unbelievers. Equally, its roots are geopolitical, bound up in the sense of inferiority that makes many Muslims feel their only option is to struggle against the West's soulless, aggressive might.

This schizophrenia is clearest in Saudi Arabia: its ruling family's Washington-friendly policies on energy, Western imports, and US military bases exist alongside an inhuman, ultrareligious Wahhabist Islam that polices and monitors all aspects of life. The country's excessive outward pursuit of Western ways of life, conspicuously enjoyed but inwardly despised, is what makes its schizophrenia so dangerous. Indeed, it seems small wonder that fifteen of the nineteen 9/11 hijackers hailed from Saudi Arabia.

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After the country's ambassador told Washington that his country's school materials were "hatred-free," the *Washington Post* scrutinized some of its "reformed" religious textbooks in May 2006, concluding that they still showed Islam as the one true faith and presented jihad against unbelievers and polytheists as every believing Muslim's duty.² Its report listed numerous examples, among them the following exercise from a first-grade book:

Fill in the blanks with the appropriate words (*Islam, hellfire*):

Every religion other than _____ is false. Whoever dies outside of Islam enters _____.

Another, for fourth-graders, stated, "True belief means . . . that you hate the polytheists and infidels but do not treat them unjustly." Fifth-graders were told, "Whoever obeys the Prophet and accepts the oneness of God cannot maintain a loyal friendship with those who oppose God and his prophet, even if they are his closest relatives"—while an eighth-grade book declared, "The apes are Jews, the people of the Sabbath; while the swine are Christians, the infidels of the communion of Jesus." Finally, students in the twelfth grade were introduced to jihadism as follows: "Jihad in the path of God—which consists of battling against unbelief, oppression, injustice, and those who perpetrate it—is the summit of Islam. This religion arose through jihad and through jihad was its banner raised high."

That Saudi Arabia—of all countries!—tells its children that jihad is a struggle against injustice and oppression is a travesty. To anyone with an ounce of common sense, such a claim could only mean the Saudi state opposed itself. But in a regime that so expertly clouds its own people's senses, hardly anyone is well placed to recognize that inconvenient point.

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These sorts of books serve as teaching materials not just in Saudi Arabia but also in nineteen European countries where Saudi-run academies operate. In the future, perhaps more will have their contents doctored to save face, but even then, their staff's mentality—shaped by their own early indoctrination—will remain unchanged. The same is true of the counterterrorist program Saudi ministers established after 9/11, enlisting the very mufti to tell the nation's youth Islam is a peaceful and tolerant faith whose earlier statements included some of the most vicious calls on record for the deaths of apostates and armed struggle against unbelievers. No one seemed to grasp that the terrorist ideology the program ostensibly opposed was itself a product of what the mufti and other Wahhabists had preached in the Arab world for more than two centuries.

A report on Yemen's school textbooks commissioned by the Sana'a government in 2009 concluded that they often portrayed "the other"—quite clearly, the West—as an enemy force and invariably depicted it in a negative light. The study ended by making the excuse that these portrayals could be deemed a response to the so-called others' negative views of Islam. A cursory glance at Jordan's school textbooks reveals a similar picture; "the other" is shown without exception as the antithesis of their society, standing for all that it rejects and all it ever will. While some Western achievements are noted, enlightened democracy is mysteriously ignored, one more Arab dictatorship placing a high wall between its children and the democratic states it refuses to treat as role models.

On the one hand, textbooks reflect their societies' prior views—on the other, they illustrate which ideas those in power wish to use to shape their people's thinking. Dictators exploit this feed-

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back loop from the top down, “refining” even their populations’ everyday thoughts and cultural memory to serve their own regimes and preferred identity politics. The textbooks above and others like them say a great deal about how the Islamic world views its own cultures, as well as what kind of world it hopes to leave its children, holding a mirror up to the impotent resentment Islamic relations with the West have thrust upon entire generations.

Beyond education in the classroom, clerics and other religious figures exert influence in their mosques and are given authority even in supposedly secular Arab dictatorships by those in power to guard their own interests. It was Gamal Abdel Nasser himself, to name one example, who made Egypt’s al-Azhar University a state institution, personally appointing each of its head imams from that point on. Education, culture, and the media were made to toe the line; children’s religious instruction served as one more outlet for government propaganda.

While the Islamic State (ISIS) claims that its own ideology was handed down from on high, many of its fighters first encountered the concepts of jihad and of a caliphate in their home countries’ schools. To battle terrorists without attacking the ideas that brought them out of the woodwork seems a waste of time: while Western states laughably join with countries like Saudi Arabia and Qatar in a supposed war on terror, these same countries spend billions spreading an ideology without which the Islamic State would collapse. With allies like these, who needs enemies?

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DISSENT IN THE AGE OF GOOGLE

Five centuries after Gutenberg, the West presented the world with a second gift—an invention that would change it as irreversibly as had the printing press. The Internet proved a challenge for all states intent on keeping their people in the dark, shut off from global thought. Unsurprisingly, Islamic scholars railed against it early on just as they had against Gutenberg's invention, warning of dangers lurking in its midst. This time, however, they drew the short straw: many young Muslims now surf the net several hours a day, discussing politics and religion, listening to Western music, and viewing pornography. The online age has altered their morals and intellectual leanings alike: a young Muslim handed information by a teacher or scholar today no longer has to accept it as the absolute truth, now that he is able to verify its accuracy for himself or research opposing viewpoints.

More than any other, it was the Facebook generation that took to Egypt's streets to oppose (indeed depose) Mubarak and Morsi, as well as those of other states ruled by dictators—Ben Ali in Tunisia, Saleh in Yemen, Gaddafi in Libya, Assad in Syria. Today their demonstrations continue. The children of the Internet are curious, critical-minded, and no longer willing to put up with a perimeter fence around their thoughts—or the inviolability of religious authority.

In 2012, I took part in a panel debate in Cairo. A prominent expert on economics from the Muslim Brotherhood was also present, and he spoke of the group's economic plans. "God willing," he said, "we hope to double the number of international tourists visiting Egypt in the next five years."

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A young audience member immediately got to his feet, retorting, “I’m a Muslim too—I pray five times a day—but we’re discussing economics and tourism. What’s that got to do with God’s will? Would you mind actually telling us something concrete about what you plan to do and how? Tell us what your budget is. Tell us where you’d build new hotels. And for goodness’ sake, leave God out, because I don’t want to hear you say it just wasn’t his will when your plan fails later on.” I was dumbfounded by the words, “Leave God out,” especially from a believing Muslim.

Thanks to the Internet, the very concept of secularism is being discussed differently in the Arab world. Secularism once meant something akin to blasphemy, but the Egyptian people’s bitter experiences of life under the Muslim Brotherhood in the aftermath of the 2012 elections have shattered the taboo of discussing separation of religion and the state. After the talk I gave in Cairo on religious fascism, a young Egyptian man approached me, commenting, “You’re right, essentially, but I find your wording far too provocative—it gets a lot of people’s backs up. When you say we need to separate religion from politics, it makes religion sound like something destructive, a tumor on society that needs to be excised. What if instead, you said we had to shield religion from politics? That would suggest religion was something pure, something not to be contaminated with everyday issues.”

The young man’s approach struck me as creative. Sugaring the pill was never my style. I prefer to call things as I see them, but the fact that he aired his concerns at all shows that young Muslims are starting to consider religion’s destructive presence in politics. Across the Arab world, a lively debate is emerging over its role in postrevolutionary societies, a silver lining amid depressing polit-

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ical realities. Sadly, levelheaded young people are far from the only ones joining it: hell-bent on defending religion's influence on law and politics at any cost, fanatics are hot on their tail, with new media—Facebook especially—lending their views and propaganda campaigns a platform. The Internet is accessible to all and sundry and it demonstrates a violent culture clash raging among Arab users today between those willing finally to enter the twenty-first century and those keen to persevere in the seventh.

You might think to ask what the printing press and its arrival in the Arab world have to do with Islamic fascism. You might add that the ideas of the Enlightenment were most successfully promoted and enshrined in Germany, where Nazism still managed to implement its inhuman ideology, and you might also point out that Hitler used Gutenberg's greatest invention to publish tirades of hatred in book, article, and flyer form. All this is granted as true: German fascism showed tremendous skill in availing itself of modernity's accomplishments, advancing its goals and enabling both extermination of Europe's Jews and development of new weaponry by keeping technological and ideological pace with the times.

But after the Second World War ended, the fact that Germany had been home to a different view of the world and of humanity before Nazism's rise helped make a fresh start possible, fostering the country's recovery and providing a reset switch of sorts. Far be it from me to diminish the challenges of reconstruction at the time, some of which continue today—nor am I unaware that children who knew only the brainwashing of Nazi demagogues at school often had trouble breaking free from it—but notwithstanding these difficulties, the fact that a prior social model existed meant its values could be reasserted.

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In the Islamic world, by contrast, long-term opposition to the printing press—as well as to the achievements that followed in its wake—cemented the two societies' asymmetry. Loyalty to those in power, their cults of personality, the inviolable Qur'an, and scholars broadcasting its absolute truth became the demand of a social hierarchy that saw the world in black and white, sorting its people into friends and foes. Today's Islamic fascists aspire to keep just such a hierarchy afloat, along with the worldview found at its heart, while the Google generation protests, arguing with its teachers and even with imams at the mosque, no longer convinced that the Qur'an holds the sum of all human knowledge. Its wariness of a hierarchy-based culture comes several centuries overdue in the Islamic world, but it is coming nonetheless.

Still, growing wary of it is one thing; the process of achieving real intellectual growth is quite another. Protests, demonstrations, and the deposing of dictators are one part of it; building a healthy political and democratic culture, together with a viable economy, is another. Five centuries' worth of thought, knowledge, and experience passed between the eras of Gutenberg and Zuckerberg, from whose influence the Islamic world—knowingly or otherwise—sealed itself off. Muslim societies en route to modernity today are feeling a painful need to make up for lost time, and the click of a mouse here or there may turn out not to be enough. Then again, the click of a mouse has already achieved far more than anyone foresaw.

CHAPTER 6

“HEIL OSAMA!”— FAILED STATES AND SUCCESSFUL TERRORISTS

In 2001, a minority of the world’s Muslims hailed the September 11, 2001, attacks as a glorious victory for Islam, triumphing over that most arrogant superpower, the United States. Likewise, a significant minority condemned the attacks. Most, meanwhile, were gripped by uncertainty, unsure whether to denounce 9/11’s atrocities or to look on them with pride—a cognitive dissonance that would prove fatal.

Before long, conspiracy theories circulated, holding that since Muslim terrorists could never actually be responsible, that Mossad and/or the CIA had masterminded the hijackings. A day later, on September 12, the Syrian newspaper *al-Thawra* claimed that four thousand Jews did not go to work in the World Trade Center on the day of the attacks. Since then, this rumor has been circulating in Arab media and has survived until today. This lie was meant to implicate Israel; indeed, it was so outrageous that it ought to have been quashed effortlessly, yet the suggestion stuck.

It is a genuinely absurd thought: Mossad ringing up four thousand people, requesting politely that they remain at home all the next day due to an impending attack. No less absurd is the premise that all four thousand stood by the hijackers, not one of them feeling

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the slightest pang of conscience or succumbing to the urge to sell a scoop to the *New York Times*. The final absurdity is that the same conspiracy theorists who blamed Mossad also deemed the attacks America's comeuppance from on high, as Allah's way of rebuking the aggressive United States for throwing its weight around—even the denialists were of two minds about whether the hijackings were their own god's work or that of the hated Jews.

In 2002, US political scientist Francis Fukuyama co-wrote an essay titled "Heil Osama."¹ In it, Fukuyama is taken aback at the extent of Osama bin Laden's idolization among Muslims, despite his failure to end even one of the Islamic world's problems. In fact, bin Laden—son of a Saudi contractor—built nothing of his own in the Islamic world, orchestrating only two US buildings' demolition—fighting neither poverty nor economic stagnation, neither illiteracy nor unemployment, and not even bothering to pay them so much as lip service. What, Fukuyama asked, could possibly be heroic about such a man? In truth, many of the Islamic world's societies have now failed, faced with what seem insurmountable challenges—and, as ever, blaming a phantom enemy is easier than looking within.

Fukuyama's essay warned that in the cold light of day, Muslims then lauding bin Laden would pay the same price as did Germans who sang Hitler's praises uncritically till he laid waste to his own country and then half of the world. Whenever feelings of bitterness and helplessness run high, demagogues like Hitler and bin Laden emerge, needing only to rouse public discontent further, fanning the flames of fear and hatred and offering a convenient scapegoat. A ready-made conspiracy theory here, a mass delusion there—fascism's phantom enemy, for instance—and suddenly their people lose all control.

"HEIL OSAMA!"

Supposed threats posed by external enemies or certain social groups are easier to focus on than multifaceted, self-inflicted problems in one's homeland. Likewise, rejoicing at the collapse of two towers a world away is easier than being angry when millions of children walk one's own streets without a roof over their heads. Many Arab countries' domestic ills are grave enough that no one there knows where to begin, and the specter of the enemy is ever-present enough in classrooms, mosques, and the media that few can see past it.

Bin Laden drew on three sources while crafting al-Qaeda's mythos: the chronic historic sickness of the Islamic world's soul; Islam's baseless claim to universal power; and the thriving Arab petrodollar, a sign of prosperity without production. Mohamed Atta and his eighteen fellow hijackers were children of a generation brought up conservatively in their own countries before falling victim to modernity's temptations both there and in the West, tasting forbidden fruit and finding themselves guilt stricken. Their hatred of America was so intense that in order to deal it a blow, they were prepared to blow themselves and countless innocent bystanders quite literally out of the sky.

Such an act speaks to Islamism's self-destructiveness. How much time, money, planning, and daydreaming must have gone into the 9/11 attacks, and how did they profit the Islamic world? Or, rather: how severely did they backfire on it?

The nineteen young men in question all studied in the West. Instead of deeming this an enriching opportunity, a chance to broaden their thinking and with it their everyday lives, they succumbed to the lure of radicalization. With no grasp of the meaning of freedom, they clung desperately to religion, shielding them-

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selves from the winds of change—in other words, from modernity. Former smokers occasionally show even less tolerance for tobacco than lifelong smokers, and likewise, converts and “reverts” seem uniquely intolerant of their own sins, hoping to hide all trace of their decadent pasts by razing the society where they spent them to the ground—finding fault not in themselves or in their own culture, but in the one they curse so bitterly for leading them astray.

The September 11 hijackers were a broken generation’s most prominent members, torn in two by the pull of a Western lifestyle on the one hand and a hermetically sealed world on the other—a generation that produced most of the Islamic world’s current teachers, imams, opinion formers, and professors, only a very few of which grew up to be terrorists. These people go to work, laugh with their friends and colleagues, go to see Western films, and cheer for the Barcelona or Arsenal soccer teams—they wear jeans and listen to music—yet many of them carry an ever-mutating virus that threatens to break out at any time: a virus known as jihad.

Militant Islamists have made their presence known within every Muslim country. Each has already suffered its share of attacks, or at least produced the terrorists who mounted them elsewhere, and the same applies to Europe, Africa, and Asia’s Muslim minorities. Whether they hail from the wealthy Gulf states or from impoverished North Africa, from Indonesia or Nigeria—whether they operate in the Philippines, Somalia, Germany, Spain, or England—jihad today is an active and aggressive pathogen.

Around the world, all Muslim radicals display the same mindset and capacity for violence. As a result—because the virus of jihad draws its destructive power from Islam’s teachings and history—Islamism is a phenomenon inextricable from Islam itself.

“HEIL OSAMA!”

It was Muhammad, not modern Islamists, who invented jihad, and asserting Islam’s universality and agitating against unbelievers are themes in the Qur’an itself, not just the work of Sayyid Qutb and Abul Ala Maududi. Only when Islam’s political roots are acknowledged can it be fully understood.

Unlike Christians, who lived as a minority for three hundred years, Islam’s followers saw early political success, with the Prophet’s religion forming the basis of a nation-state within his own lifetime, indeed only a matter of years after its founding. Muhammad waged wars to uphold and increase his own power, promising Muslims world domination, and today the dream of Islamizing the world through warfare constitutes a divine mission for many Muslims, mandatory even 1,400 years after their prophet’s death.

Certain Muslims relativize the virus of jihad insistently, terming armed conflict with Islam’s enemies the “lesser jihad” and the “spiritual struggle” of seeking God the “greater jihad.” One should not be deceived by this distinction. In 9/11’s aftermath, Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi composed a 1,400-page tome titled *Understanding Jihad*. In it he explains when jihad is necessary, who has the right to declare it, and under what circumstances they can do so. Many Arab intellectuals published apologetic articles condemning the attacks and painting Islam as a religion of peace and opposed to every variety of violence. Many of the same articles would appear over a decade later with the rise of the Islamic State—most recently after its execution of Jordanian pilot Muath al-Kasasbeh by burning him alive—as well as in the wake of 2015’s *Charlie Hebdo* massacre. Theologians worked dutifully to sanitize Islam’s image by terming it a religion of peace.

While some of these theologians have managed to admit that

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Islamic scripture—taken, supposedly, out of context—served to legitimize the atrocities in question, none have yet dared suggest that sharia and jihad may be outdated concepts in the twenty-first century. Almost no one today dares admit publicly how old the virus of jihad actually is—exactly the same age as Islam, to be precise.

The problem facing today's world is not distortion of the concept of jihad: the problem is jihad itself, as understood and practiced by Islam's prophet and his successors. The problem is that the Qur'an partitions the world into believers and unbelievers. The problem is the inviolability of the Prophet and the Qur'an, and the inability of educators to break free from glorifying their philosophy as a model moral code for all eras. The problem is jihad taken as an end in itself, a conflict whose soldiers mean to do battle until the end of days.

CHAPTER 7

PORNOTOPIA— JIHAD AND THE PROMISE OF PARADISE

In Surah 9, God offers Muslims a powerful incentive to fight for his cause: “Allah has purchased from the believers their lives and their properties [in exchange] for that they will have Paradise. They fight in the cause of Allah, so they kill and are killed. [It is] a true promise [binding] upon Him in the Torah and the Gospel and the Qur’an. And who is truer to his covenant than Allah? So rejoice in your transaction which you have contracted. And it is that which is the great attainment.”

But what does this paradise look like? Judging by descriptions elsewhere, it seems to have been plucked straight from the feverish dreams of desert-dwelling males: paradise would include enjoying a mild climate (neither too hot nor too cold); shaded gardens filled with comfortable seats; rivers of clear water and wine that cause neither intoxication nor headaches; virgins whose satin robes barely conceal buxom breasts; and eunuchs offering endless fruit, poultry, and jugs of wine.

Houris, as the virgins of the Islamic paradise are known, are referred to in the Qur’an as “exquisite pearls,” though the philologist Christoph Luxenberg deems this a mistranslation, noting the word *houris* stems from Syro-Aramaic and means “white grape.”

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The Qur'an itself fails to specify how many such grapes and/or pearls await martyrs in paradise, but the *hadith*—records of the Prophet's wider statements—make several mentions of them being recompensed to the tune of seventy-two virgins, each waited on by seventy of her own maidservants: in total, then, 5,040 women per martyr. This is a handsome fee for dying in battle with unbelievers.

Writing about these virgins and the erotic pleasure ostensibly reserved for Muslim martyrs, Islamic commentators have let their own fantasies run free. What their own books say on the subject of coitus in paradise could never be published by an Arab author today without official censors classifying it immediately as pornography. One particular medieval theologian, al-Suyuti, declares, "Each time we sleep with a *houri*, her virginity shall afterward be restored. No Muslim's phallus shall ever slacken, his erection lasting eternally, the bliss of congress unearthly and unendingly sweet. . . . Each chosen man shall have seventy *houris* in addition to his earthly wives, each possessing an exquisite and irresistible vagina."¹

Author and Islam expert Thomas Maul is astonished that Muslim fantasies of salvation revolve not around being at one with Allah but around endless sex in a celestial brothel.² The main appeal of paradise appears to be the total liberation and appeasement of the male sex drive, with all earthly taboos and prohibitions waived—except for women, of course, who remain sex objects for men even in paradise, serving as ever-ready ladies of the night and benefiting only inasmuch as paradise spares them the burden of periods, conception, and childbirth. Even this is ultimately a double-edged sword, guaranteeing constant availability to the sex-hungry males of Allah's flawless pornotopia.

MUHAMMAD'S LEGENDARY POTENCY

Practically all forms of totalitarianism feature fixed gender roles: men work the fields and defend the land; women are devoted to men faithfully and busy themselves as homemakers and child bearers, inculcating in their offspring an all-important love of king and country. Sexuality acts for the most part as an aid to reproduction, with the preservation of one's own race—as in National Socialism—a key duty to the fatherland.

Islam's relationship with sexuality is contradictory. Picture the medieval Islamic world, and images of half-naked harem women, eunuchs, and maidservants dancing erotically spring to mind; picture today's Islamic world, and instead veiled women come to mind, absent from all spheres of public life—as do sexually frustrated young people who are struggling to meet religious morality's demands. Even the earliest Islamic texts prove paradoxical, challenging readers to decide if they represent an oversexed, touchy-feely religion or an ascetic, body-phobic one. The fact remains that these texts view sexuality solely through male eyes, with endless religious scholasticism painstakingly detailing how men can achieve maximum pleasure.

Islam's distinct relationship with women and sexuality begins with its prophet's, whose mother died while he was still a child. In 595, the first woman he married was fifteen years older than he was: Khadija, a widow, made Muhammad a partner in her business and served as his greatest mentor, remaining his sole wife until her death at age sixty-five in 619, whereupon Muhammad entered marriages with a number of new women. As well as his second wife, Sawda bint Zam'a, he married Aisha, the nine-year-old daughter of

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his best friend, Abu Bakr. (Abu Bakr would go on to be the first of the Muslim caliphs after Muhammad's death; Umar, another friend of the Prophet's and father of Muhammad's fourth wife, Hafsa, would then succeed Abu Bakr.) Altogether, Muhammad married eleven women after Khadija's death, most of them after he turned fifty-five—an age at which his virility may have waned somewhat. Certainly, none of these later unions resulted in children.

Early Islamic commentators cultivated the image of a virile, sexually potent prophet, claiming Muhammad to have had “the power of thirty men”—an exaggeration typical of Muhammad's biographers in general and which is anything but coincidental.

Not least during Islam's military expansions, the figure of the virile male lover was inextricable from that of the capable man of war. Accordingly, tradition holds that after defeating the Jewish Banu Qurayzah tribe, Muhammad beheaded all its men, taking the women and girls prisoner.³ When one of the Prophet's soldiers asked his permission to take a female sex slave, his eye on the beautiful Safiyya, another of Muhammad's companions told him she was the daughter of the tribe's leader, and so Muhammad decreed Safiyya belonged to him. He raped her the same day he had her father, husband, and brothers decapitated—which was an act of sexual jihad, so to speak, given that the wombs of the tribe's women mattered as much to him as did wiping out its men. This story does more than testify to Muslim warlords' sexual self-indulgence and degradation of their enemies—it portrays the propagation of Islam in the most literal sense. Narratives like it mythicize, lionize, and legitimize rape, as even Muhammad's enemies are roped into swelling his ranks—a custom his later marriage to Safiyya did nothing to discourage.

Claiming women as spoils of war was by no means original to Muhammad, but in modern times the practice has long since been deemed a war crime. Only militant Islamists still cling to it, eyeing themselves as guardians of glorious Islamic tradition as they raid Christian and Yazidi villages in Syria and Iraq, raping and sometimes impregnating unbelieving women in the name of divine struggle.

Muhammad's own statements about women are—to say the least—ambivalent. Much of this can be chalked up to tensions between his youngest wife, Aisha, and the rest of his wives, who lived in the same house.⁴ At one point, Muhammad is said to have told his followers, “Marry a virgin, each of you, for their wombs are more fruitful, their lips sweeter and their appetites easily sated.”⁵ (Of all his wives, only Aisha was still a virgin on her wedding day.) Tradition holds that on another occasion, Muhammad declared, “No battlefield for believers remains unpacified save that of women”—yet the same Muhammad is said to have told his followers, “I urge you all: treat your women with kindness.”⁶

Muhammad was the first to afford women—formerly passed down by their men's families like furniture—the right to inherit, also emphasizing their rights to their own property and businesses and stating men and women to be equal in the eyes of God. All the same, there exist a series of statements where he outright demonizes women, once even claiming, “I looked into hell and found most of its denizens were women.”⁷

Much like the exaggeration of his virility, Muhammad's strict stance on and wariness of women may have been products of jealousy or insecurity. Accounts describe one incident where Aisha—then a teenager—stood accused of infidelity; she disappeared en

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route when Muhammad, by this point an old man, took her on one of his campaigns, only to be found the next morning with another man. Even before the Prophet's triumphant arrival in Medina, the story was the talk of the town, and Muhammad—deeply aggrieved—is said to have wept for days. Banishing his unfaithful wife, as his cousin Ali recommended, would only have bruised both Muhammad's ego and Aisha's reputation. What to do, then? Luckily, help came from on high: the Qur'an claims it was revealed to Muhammad that unbelievers concocted the tale to defame him.

Nevertheless, the wretched story stuck, and when Muhammad's wives accused one of their own of having sex with an Egyptian slave, Muhammad ordered the slave's death forthwith. Before this grave sentence could be carried out, the executioner (cousin Ali again) is said to have discovered the slave was castrated. Subsequently, Muhammad began monitoring his wives more carefully, introducing stricter codes of dress and social interaction. Might reports of the Prophet's powerful sex drive have been to allay suspicions that he struggled to satisfy his brides?

Muhammad had his wives fully veiled, permitting them to speak to men only with a wall separating them. One day, Muhammad came home to find two of his wives conversing with a blind man. Flying into a rage, he demanded to know what made them disobey his command to conceal themselves. When one of his wives told him, "This man is blind," an irate Muhammad replied, "But you are not."⁸

Traditionalists romanticize tales like these today, with the Prophet's wives serving as role models for all Muslim women and Muslim conservatives justifying gender apartheid as a way of life "in accordance with the Prophet's teachings."

GENDER APARTHEID AND THE FETISHIZATION OF VIRGINITY

At its foundation, Islam's sexual morals and mistrust of women are legacies of Judaism—as, more specifically, are its proscriptions on extramarital sex and tradition of stoning adulteresses. The religious cult of virginity only intensified under Islam, however, spurring a view of women that still holds sway in the twenty-first century.

Historically, women in multiple sexual relationships had no way of knowing whom their children's fathers were. Accordingly, Islam criminalizes extramarital sex to safeguard each family's bloodline—yet the father in Islam is more than head of his family; he bears responsibility for handing the faith down to his children. (In Judaism, by contrast, a mother determines her child's religion.) Islamic wives are isolated and their lives policed, the wearing of the *hijab* symbolizing not just the mistrust of the outside world expected of women but also their husbands' mistrust of them.

Gender apartheid and fetishization of virginity have their origins not in bloodline-preservation but in Islam's genuine attitude towards women. However, as Thomas Maul explains in his book *Sex, Dihad und Despotie* (Sex, Jihad and Despotism)—in which Maul examines the penal code of the Islamic Republic of Iran and concluding that it prizes a woman's virginity more highly than it does her life.

Islam contains the concept of *diyya*, blood money paid to victims of serious injury or to the families of murder victims by assailants. Much as a woman is permitted to inherit only half the amount a man is, the sum payable to a murdered woman's next of kin is only half the *diyya* for a murdered man. In cases of physical injury, the arith-

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metic gets more interesting: Article 297 of Iran's penal code sets the fine for killing a man at a hundred camels, setting the same value on his testes—the left at 66.6 camels, the right at 33.3, a discrepancy explained by sharia's claim that the former is responsible for conception of boys, the latter for that of girls. In short, a man's left testicle is worth more on paper than is a woman's life—for which only fifty camels are required. Should a virgin woman be violently raped, her own hymen also commands a higher diyya than does her life according to Article 441 (the dowry she might have commanded on marriage serves as a compensatory surcharge).

Iranian women are stoned to death for sleeping with men they love before marrying them. If a woman offers herself to a new man each week, meanwhile, securing a short-term marriage contract, she remains a devout, god-fearing Shiite in the eyes of religious marriage laws, which permit this freely, while allowing men to bed multiple women every day without transgressing Islam's boundaries.

Islam's approach to marriage has nothing to do with love—on the contrary, the institution serves as a contractual arrangement between a man and woman, conferring on each certain rights and responsibilities determined and enforced by the state. The sole objective of any marriage is the propagation of Islam; any relationship resisting or eluding state control is deemed a threat and punished unflinchingly. Acid attacks on unveiled women, genital mutilation, honor killings, and stonings exist alongside marriage as misogynist parts of historically Muslim societies, betraying fear of female independence and emotion alike. Much like fascism's own worst nightmare—that of the nation's enemies attacking while it sleeps—such fears are regarded as positively virtuous.

To confront the realities of life in the Islamic world today is to face up to a great deal of misery, as well as a preponderance of moral double standards around sex. Nowhere is hymen reconstruction surgery more widely performed than in Muslim areas of the globe⁹—this much is common knowledge, yet few are willing to acknowledge it. In countries where sexual stigma is at its most extreme—Afghanistan, Iran, Egypt—street harassment has reached insufferable levels for women, while Islamists lure young men into joining the Syrian conflict with promises of sexual jihad.

Young Muslim girls from all corners of the Islamic world, North Africa especially, sell themselves to jihadists in Syria's war zones, while Sunnite scholars preach sexual jihad, citing the Prophet's own authority, who allowed soldiers "short-term marriages" to enemy women as a means of venting sexual frustrations during long campaigns. In pursuit of a higher goal—jihad—Islamists suspend their own faith's prohibition on sex outside marriage, thereby motivating soldiers with both the earthly promise of women and the dream of a rape-filled paradise.

CHAPTER 8

ISLAMIC BOMBS AND SHIITE FASCISM

Two nights meandering through inner-city Beirut's cafés, bars, and clubs are almost enough to make me believe Western lifestyles have won out in Lebanon; European notions of freedom may finally be catching on, but appearances can be deceptive. On my third day in the city, I head for the southern Dahieh district, and the ten-minute taxi ride sparks a dramatic change of scenery. Scarcely any women there walk the streets without headscarves on, and the faces of those martyred in Lebanese conflicts with Israel are plastered on outer walls. Below, I can make out the words: "Never forget. South Beirut is Hezbollah country."

My taxi passes UN camps where there are Palestinians born in Lebanon who nonetheless have the status of refugees and are therefore excluded from most jobs. They are supposed to remain refugees so that sometime they may return to Palestine. In Europe, Canada, and the United States, Palestinians live vastly different lives as doctors, lawyers, and entrepreneurs, having long since attained citizenship in their adoptive states; even in Israel, Palestinian-born citizens hold seats in the Knesset (legislature). These exiles have faced political reality, making of it the best they can and maintaining an Arab or Palestinian identity without prolonging their predicament, as Arab states' treatment of Palestinians emi-

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nently has. Rather than helping the children of Palestinian refugees gain Saudi, Kuwaiti, or Lebanese citizenship, which officials claim may harm Palestine's cause because it would undermine the right of those uprooted to return, Arab governments have deserted their refugees.

“National pride means armed resistance,” I read on a sign between billboards of Ayatollah Khomeini and Hassan Nasrallah—one formerly the head of Iran's Shiite regime, the other Hezbollah's secretary general.

Few movements have managed to instill fascism's core ideas as closely as Nasrallah's group, whose Blackshirts serve not just as a militia but also as armed police in a state-within-a-state. Anti-Semitism forms a constant refrain in its activities, as do unquestioning loyalty to a single leader, battle-readiness, and potential martyrdom—the latter praised beyond measure. Even today, Nazi salutes still feature in Hezbollah's military parades.

HEZBOLLAH AND HAMAS

Inspired by 1979's Islamic Revolution in Iran, Shiite clerics like Mohammad Hussein Fadlallah imported the concept of *velayat-e faqih*—“the guardianship of the jurist”—to Lebanon. Modeled on the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, Shiite militias formed in southern Lebanon and expanded their field of military control when Israeli forces invaded. A fatwah from Ayatollah Khomeini granted Hezbollah permission to intervene in the Lebanese Civil War. Just as Khomeini had trained commandos for suicide missions in his war with Iraq, Hezbollah staged the first successful Muslim suicide bombings attacking Western targets. On October

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23, 1983, Hezbollah operatives drove two trucks carrying high explosives into a US base inside Beirut that was established after the civil war's outbreak the previous year. The bombers detonated the trucks while still inside, killing 305 others—241 US marines, 58 French paratroopers, and six civilians.¹ The attack proved inspirational for Islamists the world over, not just due to the destruction it caused, but because in the aftermath, US forces withdrew from Lebanon. In the end, it was as much a victory for Iran's mullahs—in whose eyes America was the devil incarnate—as for Hezbollah, which achieved fame throughout the Arab world for its “triumph over America.”

It was only a few years later that Hamas first emerged from the shadows in occupied Palestine, mimicking not just Hezbollah's structure and fascist ideology, but also its tactics. All over the Islamic world, suicide came to be a political act, with Islamists proving their capacity for violence and hatred by targeting Tel Aviv buses, the London Underground, tourists in Luxor and Sharm el-Sheikh, bars in Bali, Western embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, a Jewish temple on the Tunisian island of Djerba, New York's World Trade Center, and the Pentagon in Washington, DC. Thousands more attacks have been carried out in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Morocco, and Egypt, with Muslims invariably being the first casualties.

Iran's influence on Hezbollah's culture has been profound, as the group relies on the Islamic Republic for both military and financial support alike. Hassan Nasrallah served as the leader of its political arm, with Ayatollah Ali Khamenei as Hezbollah's spiritual leader. *Hezbollah* is Arabic for “Party of God,” and since 1992 several seats in Lebanon's parliament have fallen to its represen-

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tatives. The country's Shiite groups are not the only places where Hezbollah is held in high esteem. Thanks in no small part to the Al-Manar satellite channel, which beams its propaganda into living rooms around the world, Hezbollah's support base outside its homeland is formidable. When military conflicts erupted between Lebanon and Israel in the last decade, first in 2000 and then in 2006, the group's popularity rose dramatically, its spin doctors having sold Israeli forces' retreat in the south as a decisive victory and styling themselves from then on as Lebanon's home guard.

In 2008, this support faltered somewhat when Hezbollah Blackshirts marched on downtown Beirut for the first time, threatening the whole city with occupation. After being banned from occupying communications buildings, the group chose to escalate the dispute, which resulted in conflict-averse Lebanese voters punishing Hezbollah at the polls in the elections that followed.

The same day I arranged to speak with one of the party's officials, another interviewee—one I found more important—asked me to meet him at short notice. Having spent years hearing the same messages several times a day on Al-Manar's religious programming, I felt sure I already knew what the Hezbollah man would say about Islam, jihad, and righteous resistance. By contrast, meeting the late Shiite theologian Hani Fahs—one of Lebanon's best known and most controversial religious leaders prior to his death in 2014—proved powerfully rewarding; his thoughts were as intriguing as they were refreshing.

As a young mullah in Beirut, Fahs was acquainted with Yasser Arafat during the latter's time with the Palestine Liberation Organization. (Arafat, Fahs told me when we met, "was a tremendous narcissist. He was constantly trying to correct one flaw and ending

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up with a much worse one.”²) Fahs proofread Arafat’s first letter to Ayatollah Khomeini, refining his phrasing and personally passing it to Khomeini in the Iraqi city of Najaf during his exile from Iran. Later, in 1978, Fahs encountered Khomeini in Paris and followed him back to Tehran after the Islamic Revolution. Yet Fahs was never destined to be the Che Guevara of Islam. Uninterested in a career in a regime of mullahs, and seeing the revolution’s toll on its children and their country alike, he left Iran, disenchanted, several years later.

At our first meeting, Fahs was sitting comfortably in his living room, the wall behind him covered in photographs of him with Khomeini, Arafat, and other Middle Eastern politicians, among them Iran’s former president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who was pictured embracing the grief-stricken mother of deceased Venezuelan premier Hugo Chávez. Fahs must have noticed my gaze lingering, for he commented, “Ahmadinejad shows the Islamic Revolution failed, and that photo shows theocracy in Iran is a sham. The mullahs over there punish women whose *hijabs* aren’t straight—meanwhile, the head of state goes around hugging women who aren’t wearing one.” The corners of his mouth twitched. “Nice picture, actually”—Fahs indicated Ahmadinejad—“but that idiot ruins it.”

The theologian’s views on Hezbollah were clear-cut and courageous as if we were talking in a café in Berlin, not in South Beirut, the heartland of Hezbollah. “They’re more fascist than fascism was. The ideology, the whole structure—it’s fascist. All of it. What Hezbollah’s doing in Syria, mind you—that’s fascism that’s still going through puberty. [Followers of] Hezbollah are turning into assassins for Assad. It’s hard for a party not to get despotic that was founded on the basis of religion, but they’re committing another

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sin as well—they're serving two masters, one in Iran and one in Syria. That's to their detriment, but Lebanon's as well."

I asked Fahs if he thought the Islamic Revolution had been a fascist one. Again, he could scarcely have been clearer: "Every revolution has a fascistic fringe toward the start. That much might well be inevitable. But a revolution that invokes God—that claims to be doing his will? A revolution like that can only come so far from fascism. All of a sudden, people who commit murder are doing God's work—the people they kill are God's enemies. Executions start being held like a religious ritual every day. It only ever ends like that."

Iran, Fahs said before he died, had taken its own people hostage, cementing its rigid social order first through war with Iraq and then through ideological warfare against the West. He did not hesitate to call the Mullah-regime "fascistic." A scholar of religious law himself, he told me he thought strict adherence to it in Sunnite and Shiite societies alike—as well as the concept of divine rule on Earth—had hamstrung the Islamic world, leaving it in a spiritually empty state.

FASCISM AS STATE DOCTRINE

Iran was the first Muslim state to make modern Islamic fascism its state doctrine. For over thirty-five years, fascist Islamist principles have been pillars of the Islamic Republic of Iran—execution of the regime's critics, total surveillance of the populace, oppression of women and aggressive anti-Semitism, for a start.

In 1979, the repercussions of the Islamic Revolution shook politics both in the Middle East and elsewhere. As well as sparking the first Gulf War between the states of Iran and Iraq, it unleashed a

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war in Afghanistan whose impact on world politics since then still proves fatal today. Likewise, it helped fuel the Lebanese Civil War, with the country's radicals set on replicating it themselves. Iran's revolution boosted the confidence of Islamists in all parts of the world, indeed even among Sunnites, whose beliefs normally clash violently with those of Shiites. For the first time in modern history, sharia theocracy was a political reality.

Protests against the shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, had erupted for various reasons, not all of which this book has room to examine, and certainly social factors besides and beyond religion played a key role. The fact remains, however, that none of the classic catalysts for revolution—extreme poverty, say, or crushing military defeat—were in play in Iran. The Islamic Revolution was more a student uprising than a peasants' revolt. Discontent with the shah's autocracy as well as the despotism of his secret service—in 1977, Amnesty International spoke out on behalf of thousands of political prisoners³—mounted both on the left and among Islamists. In the end, however, pressure exerted on US allies by newly elected president Jimmy Carter prompted the shah to free several hundred prisoners and permit mass public demonstrations: in a sense, it was America that made the revolution possible.

Students and parts of the secular left organized Iran's first protests, the latter at loggerheads with the royal family since Reza Pahlavi had been hounded from the country in 1953. Resigning himself to a life in exile, the shah was only returned to power by a CIA-led military coup, which also removed Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddegh (popular on the left) from office, rolled back Iran's oil industry, and permitted British and US corporations to return.

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When Shah Reza returned to the throne, Iran underwent a burst of modernization, with oil revenues overflowing and far-reaching socioeconomic reforms taking effect, in what was known collectively as the White Revolution. From the start, however, murmurs of discontent sounded from conservative Shiite clergy in Iran—in particular, from one mullah known at the time as Ruhollah Moosavi Khomeini.

While these events unfolded, both a leftist guerilla movement and a revolutionary Islamist group, Fada'iyān-e Islam, emerged, hoping to alter their country's future through armed conflict. The shah responded with violence, and riots, murders, and arson attacks followed, leaving the country on the brink of chaos. At this point, the West turned its back on Iran, forcing its shah to flee once more. The Islamic Revolution had begun.

THE FÜHRER OF PERSIA (AND OTHER SIGNS FROM GOD)

The title *ayatollah* translates as “miracle” or “sign from God.” Before adopting it himself, the mullah it would come to denote was called Ruhollah Moosavi Khomeini. In 1943, he published a manifesto of sorts under this name, committing to the page his personal philosophy of an Islamic state. In this document, titled *Kashf al-Asrar* (The Uncovering of Secrets), Khomeini writes: “Islamic governance is that of divine justice, whose laws are neither alterable nor contestable.”⁴ Three years later, the group of theology students he founded under the name Fada'iyān-e Islam—roughly, “devotees of Islam”—hoped to prepare Iran's society for a future under sharia, as well as to promote jihadist ideals of martyrdom.

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By 1963, the mullah—now known as Ayatollah Khomeini—was a well-known cleric in the city of Qom, forging mass resistance to the White Revolution’s nationwide reforms and enshrinement of women’s rights. Khomeini viewed such reforms as clear breaches of sharia, angered not least by a new ban on marriages to underage girls—an undisguised encroachment on Islamic family law.

The reformists’ plans were humane and highly progressive, promising among other things:

- abolition of feudal customs and the transfer of agricultural land from major landowners to the country’s peasants;
- nationalization of forests and pastures;
- privatization of state industries to fund compensation for landowners;
- profit sharing for workers and industrial employees;
- active and passive electoral rights for women; and
- a teaching corps to combat illiteracy.

In a 1963 referendum, Iran’s electorate ratified these reforms. Two years later, Prime Minister Asadollah Alam, who hailed from a family of Bahá’ís, left office. Diverging from Islamic clergy’s view of Muhammad as God’s final prophet, Bahá’ís are viewed as apostates by Muslim theologians, unrecognized (unlike Christians or Jews) as a protected religious minority in modern-day Iran. Khomeini himself deemed Alam’s appointment as head of government a threat to the nation’s Muslim identity, maintaining the stance that Muslims should never be ruled by non-Muslims: for him, Bahá’ís and other apostates were no different from unbelievers.

Khomeini saw *velayat-e faqih*, “the guardianship of the jurist,” as the Islamic world’s salvation, calling on his fellow Iranians to

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revolt against the shah's regime in an inflammatory speech given in Qom. "Rise up for revolution, for jihad and for reform," the mullah implored his listeners, "for we refuse to live under criminal rule! We deserve to follow our own prophet and our imams, who will defend us on the Day of Judgment."⁵ On delivering this speech, Khomeini was arrested and later exiled first to Turkey and then to Iraq, where he wrote his second and most important manifesto, *Hokumat-i Eslami* (The State under Islam), in 1970, which set out his concept of *velayat-e faqih* in detail, as well as the rules and cornerstones of the theocracy he hoped to found.

Despite obvious antidemocratic and antihuman convictions, Khomeini's revolutionary zeal enthralled many leftist opponents of the shah, helped by his pointed anti-Western views and calls for renationalization of Iranian oil production. More than once, nonetheless, his views on Islamic law provoked anxiety on the left. "The claim [that] Islam's laws can be superseded or apply solely to one time or place violates Islam's core spirit," Khomeini wrote on the subject of sharia in *Hokumat-i Eslami* (The State under Islam).⁶ "For according to the blessed prophet, the application of its laws remains obligatory until the end of time. Did he spend twenty-three years of arduous work establishing and enforcing laws meant only for a certain era? Did God devise his laws to be applied only for a mere two hundred years?" Khomeini openly rejected the principle of democratic self-determination, stressing the exclusive sovereignty of divine law on Earth, its function to enforce God's will.

Four years earlier, in 1966, the young mullah Ali Khamenei—later to assume the reins of Iran's religious state after Khomeini's death in 1989—had translated a book from Arabic titled *The Future of This Religion*. Its author was Sayyid Qutb, mastermind

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of the Muslim Brotherhood, and Khomeini himself would seize upon many of its ideas, among them the concept of *hakimiyyah*, “the rule of God on Earth.” Qutb had already demanded an Islamic revolution of his own prior to writing the book, hoping to return his Muslim society to the glory days of the Prophet Muhammad by cleansing it of un-Islamic influences, and despite Shiite mullahs’ grave ideological differences with the Sunnite Muslim Brotherhood, Qutb’s book took Iran by storm, with Khomeini (who spoke fluent Arabic) enthralled by the original text’s revolutionary ideas.

In matters of government and Qur’anic law, Shiism and Sunnism’s differences are relatively few. Shiites, unlike Sunnites, may have a clergy, but the fascist ideal of an Islamic state appears in both traditions, which feature God as sole lawgiver. His laws are deemed effective for all of time, unalterable, and nonnegotiable—opposed only by unbelievers who must be eliminated.

In 1978, unrest under the shah increased. When a fatwah from Ayatollah Khomeini banned Western films, twenty-five cinemas across Iran were blown to pieces, with more than four hundred moviegoers killed in a single attack in the city of Abadan. From his Parisian exile, Khomeini sought to close ranks with leftists and the middle class, intensifying protests until in January 1979 Iran’s shah fled. Mehdi Bazargan, a secular candidate, was appointed prime minister for the interim to ensure the neutrality of both the army and the West.

On February 1, Khomeini returned to Iran, promising “freedom for every Iranian.” In a referendum held that April, he called for Iran to become an Islamic republic, and a majority of Iranians, leftists and the bourgeoisie alike—none of whom, it seems, had read *Hokumat-i Eslami* (The State under Islam)—voted yes. In the

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aftermath of the referendum, Khomeini alone decided the shape of the Islamic Republic of Iran, executing liberals and leftists whose role in overthrowing the shah had been as crucial as Islamists' for failing to toe the theocratic line. In the first two years after the revolution alone, twelve thousand people were put to death, with millions of Iranians exiled, among them the greater part of the country's educated elite. Thirty-five years later, those murdered number well into the hundreds of thousands.⁷

Alongside the army and secret police, militias modeled on Nazism's Brownshirts and SS were created to subjugate the populace with fear. The Iranian Revolutionary Guard, officially known as Sepah-e Pasdaran-e, was founded in 1979; the Basij militia followed, meting out punishment on the streets to any who dared challenge the regime, much as Hitler's bands of thugs had. Both groups could be compared to the Waffen-SS at least in terms of structure and function, coming to serve as secondary armies during Iran's war with Iraq, as political scientist Behrouz Khosrozadeh notes in a 2009 article at *heise.de*.⁸

At the time, Khosrozadeh argues, the Revolutionary Guard boasted 130,000 members, together with a larger budget than Iran's official defense force. Its members today continue to be recruited just as the SS's were, handpicked for ideological purity and conditioned more intensively than ordinary soldiers both physically and psychologically. The group possesses its own prisons, holding and torturing captives without trial. (Brutality of this nature shown toward the civilian populace by both the Revolutionary Guards and the Basij militia came to light during 2009's Green Movement, as several thousand Iranians were abducted, tortured, and raped for demonstrating peacefully against Ahmadinejad.)

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Inexplicable at first glance, Iranian anti-Semitism offers one further parallel to Nazism. With Persia having been home to Jews for 2,500 years, Iran shares neither borders nor any history of conflict with nearby Israel; and, unlike other parts of the Arab world, the country was never laid low by the colonialist West, and never suffered a military defeat at either's hands. Three factors have sustained anti-Semitism in Iran—the first being the country's close political and economic kinship with Germany. Eighty percent of the machinery that made Iranian industrialization viable was manufactured in Germany, and alongside German technology, the country imported Nazi ideology, broadcast across Iran in Persian during the Second World War.

In Zeesen, an area of Berlin, the Nazis established their own radio station to air propaganda in Persian, Arabic, Turkish, and Hindi across the Arab world. In an article from the magazine *Tribüne*, political scientist Matthias Küntzel shows that the station was popular enough that denizens of Tehran's tearooms met regularly to tune in.⁹ Iran mattered to Germany, meanwhile, because of its natural resources. Considering themselves “indo-German Aryans” rather than Arabs, Persians could claim to be a non-Semitic people, meeting Nazi race guidelines and making close relations with them more appealing. While the Second World War raged on, a majority of Iranians—not least the nation's mullahs—sided with Germany.

Sayyid Qutb's writings became a secondary source of anti-Jewish sentiment in Iran; they presented the struggle against Jews as the divine duty of all Muslims, laid down by the Prophet Muhammad and mandatory until the day of the Last Judgment. Such sentiments' third and foremost source, however, was the

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Qur'an itself, Islam's core text describing Jews variously as backstabbers¹⁰ and the offspring of apes.¹¹

As early as the first year of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini proclaimed the annual festival Quds Day, a show of solidarity with Palestine—commenting on the second Quds Day in 1980, “Israel, that fount of evil, has been an American base all along. I have warned of the Israeli threat for over twenty years. We must all of us rise up to dismantle the state of Israel and return the Palestinian people's home.”¹² Other ayatollahs and successive Iranian heads of state were even less equivocal in their hatred of Jews, the worst of all being Ahmadinejad, a Holocaust denier who labeled Israel a “cancerous ulcer” to be wiped from the world map as soon as possible. Iran's incumbent president Hassan Rouhani strikes a different tone, calling the Holocaust a crime against humanity that did both Jews and the rest of the world indescribable harm.

TAQIYYAH AND THE THEOCRATIC ART OF TELLING LIES

In Shiism, the Arabic term *taqiyyah* refers to concealing one's faith when under grave threat, a practice that dates from Islam's early years when Muslims were still a powerless minority in Meccan society. Followers of the faith were permitted to neglect ritual duties, conceal their beliefs, or deny them outright to avoid persecution at non-Muslim hands. Surah 3 states, “Let not believers take disbelievers as acquaintances rather than believers. Whoever among of you does so has no standing with Allah, except when taking precaution against them in prudence.” Friendship with

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unbelievers is permitted so long as it prevents one's life being endangered, *taqiyyah* deriving from both *tuqat* ("concealment") and *tattaqu* ("precaution").

Islam's early conquests were highly successful, with Muslims in captured areas soon constituting a ruling class if not an outright majority. For them, disguising or denying their faith was no longer a necessity; after Shiites broke off in the years following Muhammad's death, however, *taqiyyah* came to serve as a practical means of self-defense against persecution. To save their own lives, Shiites were permitted to disguise their religious views: to keep themselves (together with their families) from harm, they could mislead, lie to, or otherwise deceive potential oppressors.

Ayatollah Khomeini expanded the principle somewhat, letting supporters pose as atheists to access and infiltrate the state mechanisms of the shah's regime. ("If the circumstances of *taqiyyah* ('dissimulation') should lead one of us to join the followers of the ruler,," Khomeini writes, "then it is his duty to refrain from doing so, unless his purely formal participation would bring a genuine victory for Islam."¹³) Even in the first phases of the revolution, Khomeini concealed his intent with the aid of *taqiyyah*, misleading leftists and Iran's middle class till he had a monopoly on power. Had any of them read his statements in *Hokumat-i Eslami* (The State under Islam), in fact, which illustrate his outlook perfectly, they would have smelled a rat immediately. For their own part, Iran's leaders today are regularly accused of practicing *taqiyyah* in relation to its nuclear program, repeating mantralike their claims of purely peaceful intentions.

At the same time, it bears noting that critics of Islam mention *taqiyyah* constantly, defining it in an overbroad, inflammatory

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manner so as to brand all Muslims, irrespective of ideology, as liars who veil their true intent until such time as Europe lies conquered. Lumping Muslims together like this is irrational, and those who try to do so are only proving themselves paranoid: to claim that 1.5 billion Muslims all share uniform views is to think just like an Islamist who insists that Western minds are all the same and is intent on eradicating their culture.

The best person to ask about *taqiyyah* is a Shiite like Hani Fahs. On one of the occasions that we met, he told me an old joke about the concept that also sheds some light on the Sunnite-Shiite divide: One day, a Shiite mullah and an Arab cleric both spy an attractive woman, winking surreptitiously so as to catch her eye. When she spots the Arab's attempts to flirt, he casually rubs his eye, as if wiping away a grain of sand—then, when she notices the mullah winking, he screws his eye shut for ten years, furiously claiming never to have winked in his life. Persians, the punch line goes, tend to do things their way.¹⁴

IRAN'S REFORMISTS: FRESH START OR FACELIFT?

I once asked Fahs whether Iran's regime could be reformed. "What is there to reform?" he asked me in return, declining to offer much hope.¹⁵ "The mullahs have got God on their side—they're hardly about to admit he got it wrong, especially when they can't even admit Khomeini's views on politics and law aren't right for us today. The idea of *velayat-e faqih*, of the clerics' right to rule—you can't reform something like that. But we can overthrow them!"

For all the euphoria over President Rouhani's conciliatory politics, he remains the acceptable face of the Shiite regime—kinder

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and friendlier than Ahmadinejad, at least—even if not one of its masterminds. His congenial charm offensive strikes me as dangerously counterproductive, offering as it does the impression of change while things behind the scenes stay much the same. Perhaps a year or two from now, in return for relaxed diplomatic sanctions, the mullahs will curb their nuclear aspirations, boosting Iran's economy and pacifying parts of its populace with the proceeds, but their goals in the long run will never change.

The Soviet Union proved unreformable from within: Mikhail Gorbachev did his best, only for the whole regime to disintegrate. On certain topics, Pope Francis might likewise be adjusting the teachings of his church—something of an achievement in itself, admittedly—but he can never meaningfully reform the Catholic Church itself, for each reform invites another one. Somewhere along the line, the question of who still needs the church at all in the twenty-first century will rear its ugly head, and no reformer will dare answer honestly.

The Islamic Republic has been a briar patch for the Middle East since its very birth, its Gulf War with Iraq sparking internal conflicts in Lebanon and Afghanistan, Bahrain and Yemen alike descending into battlegrounds between the two regional powers after the Arab Spring. Today, far from coincidentally, the Islamic State is gaining ground in the same two countries—Iraq and Syria—where Iranian politics made the strongest prior impact. The Islamic State is Sunnism's belated answer to Shiite theocracy, Iran's rival Saudi Arabia intervening in both states to head off its imperialist designs and doing with particular urgency when Iran's Syrian ally Bashar al-Assad enlisted Hezbollah help against his country's own Sunnite rebels. Initially backing the Islamic militants in question, Saudi

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Arabia lost control of them just as it once had with al-Qaeda and Saddam Hussein. The Islamic State became a perfect geopolitical maelstrom, with concerns over Iran's benign new president and the new Saudi king's ill health sucked into its vortex. Whatever changes Rouhani's republic undergoes, one senses that the damage is now done—not just to Iran, but also to the entire Middle East and wider world.

In 2009, Hani Fahs backed the Iranian youth movement that opposed Ahmadinejad—nor was he the only mullah to stand with the country's young people. Did the Green Movement spell the end, I asked him once, of the chapter in Iran's history the Islamic Revolution began? “Could be,” Fahs told me.¹⁶ “But it'll take a while yet. Khomeini left the mullahs with money, with soldiers, with state security on their side. Those are hard things to dismantle. Then again, not many young people believe in the Islamic Revolution's ideas—the regime they're fighting against is stuck in its ways. It's self-destructive.”

Fahs welcomed young theologians outside Iran whose ideas differed from the old guard's, knowing this new generation could place pressure on its predecessors. “The mullahs need to know they're on their own—that's the only way change can happen now. And that pressure can't just come from within—it has to come from outside too.”

I pressed him—how could the Islamic religion ever be detached from a Shiite state? “Scholars tend to say Islam is a religion and a political system in one, but Islam isn't a strong enough basis for a nation-state. Not a functioning state today, anyway—it may have been enough at some points in the seventh century. Fundamentally, a state founded on religion is never going to be a country for all its

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citizens—it can only ever be ruled for members of the state religion. When you take a closer look at history, it's clear that whenever religion has ever involved itself with the state—the Church in the Middle Ages, the Taliban, the Muslim Brotherhood—catastrophe has followed.”

Fahs died opposed to any form of an Islamic state, believing one to be impossible. Shiites, he said, were always going to demand a state run in keeping with their beliefs, while Sunnites would want one in keeping with theirs—and Sufists would want something else entirely. In the end, he told me, there were no Islamic states—only sectarian ones like Iran, where Sunnites were persecuted alongside minorities like Bahá'ís and Jews, and Egypt, where Shiites were more fiercely loathed than either. That no one seemed to grasp this was, he said, part and parcel of life inside a sectarian state, closed off not just from different faiths but also from alternative forms of its own. In Europe, he said, the Thirty Years' War had shown as much.

Fahs was an Islamic scholar who could carry on for hours, quoting Aquinas, Kant, and Weber without referring to the Prophet or the Qur'an. “Yes,” he told me, “I'm in favor of imitating Europe. It's a model that's worked. And that Enlightenment didn't hurt Christianity; it saved it. We need one of our own, both Shiites and Sunnites. We have to accept at last that the Enlightenment wasn't about opposing religion; it was about promoting reason—and anyone who's against reason has serious issues.”

CHAPTER 9

UNBELIEVERS ON THE MARCH— MEET FIVE ATHEISTS FROM THE ISLAMIC WORLD

In countries like Egypt, Iran, Morocco, and Tunisia, the Arab Spring unleashed an internal clash of civilizations, with secular and religious forces locking horns ever since over how much influence religion should wield over public life and the law.

More and more Arab atheists are joining this debate and making their voices heard. I met and spoke with five of them, each a young person risking his or her own life to speak above the parapet—a choice I understand better than most.

THRASHING BELIEVERS ON THEIR OWN TURF

Momen's name means "faithful" in Arabic, but he became an atheist five years ago, finding a different calling altogether. At age twenty-one, he studies engineering at Cairo's deeply religious al-Azhar University, the hub of Sunnite Islam. For two years, he kept his loss of faith to himself, finding the courage to tell family and friends he no longer believed only once Mubarak had been deposed. Many of those closest to him were shocked, but Momen also found out he was far from alone.

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Numerous friends shared similar views yet were too afraid to out themselves.

Together with a couple of these friends, Momen started a Facebook page, its Arabic name meaning “Egyptian Atheists United.” Over the next few months, the page attracted thousands of members, most displaying photographs of themselves and using their real names—which is still a novelty in the Arab world. “Egyptians aren’t as religious by nature as Islamists want us to believe,” Momen tells me.¹ “My guess is every Egyptian family contains an atheist, or at least someone who takes a critical view of Islam. They’re just too scared to say anything to anybody.”

One key experience for Momen came in mid-February 2013, during an encounter with Islamists in Old Cairo. A scholar from the Muslim Brotherhood was set to deliver a lecture titled “How Does an Atheist Think?”—and Momen and three of his friends went along, taking their seats in the packed mosque.

For eighty minutes, he tells me, the sheikh preached nonstop nonsense about atheists and the theory of evolution. Once the floor was opened up near the end, Momen discovered that most of those present were fellow atheists who decided to come when they learned of the event on social media. Most were well-educated ex-Muslims, even headscarf-clad women shamelessly declaring themselves atheists and taking the lecture’s falsehoods unflinchingly to task. “We thrashed believers on their own turf,” Momen tells me proudly.

The evening’s events emboldened him to start a large-scale movement to reach Egyptians in greater numbers. The “Seculars,” as they call themselves, remain active today in Cairo, Alexandria, and three other Egyptian prefectures, holding educational events about secularist ideas. For many of the country’s Muslims, the

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concept of secularism still leaves almost as sour a taste as does atheism.

Momen never planned to politicize his unbelief, he says, “but when people’s faith is political, my lack of it is just as political by definition. As long as unbelievers face persecution, as long as religion encroaches on the private sphere, I can’t reject it purely as a private matter.”

The night Momen invited me to deliver my own talk, things turned more political than ever. I took the floor to discuss Islamic fascism, arguing that Islam evolved fascist tendencies early on in its history, long before the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood. Footage of the talk spread at viral speed on the Internet, and days later Assem Abdel Maged, spokesman of the terrorist group al-Gama’a al-Islamiyya,² not only called for my murder but threatened Momen—who was filmed sitting next to me through the talk—with death. The introduction to this book describes the events that were to follow.

The talk itself and the entire unspeakable affair brought Momen and his fellow seculars both a great deal of criticism and a multitude of threats, but also thousands upon thousands of new supporters. “To begin with,” he says, “a lot of us were hesitant to fight Islamism tooth and nail—we hung back at the edges of the skirmish because we were afraid to join the fray. That talk forced us to say what we thought publicly.”

Momen thinks secularism is a certainty, not just a possibility, in Egypt’s future. I agree. All that remains unclear is what the country will pay first. History tells me blood, and plenty of it, though Islamism has pragmatists as well as endless martyrs on its side. Which tendency is destined to win out is unforeseeable, but either

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way, the radicals will lose in the end, for empty promises are all that they have to offer.

“I’LL DIE ON MY FEET”

The man across the table from me last sat outside a café a year ago. He strikes me as congenial but detached, his gaze darting frantically in between passers-by, though he never appears scared. Scanning the street for stories and inspiration rather than would-be assailants, Iranian singer-songwriter Shahin Najafi draws on the world around him for material, observing those in his vicinity.

We meet in Berlin on May 10, 2013, the eightieth anniversary of the city’s infamous book burnings and one year to the day since he entered hiding, a fatwah from his homeland’s ayatollahs placing \$100,000 on his head. A song alone was enough to prompt this, in whose imaginary dialogue Shahin implores Muhammad’s descendant Naghi to return to Iran, to free the country from dictatorship and buoy its people’s spirits with love, Viagra, and breast implants.

Shahin denies being a provocateur in use of religious imagery. “I never meant to attack religion,” he tells me.³ “That’s what people accuse me of who misuse it as a tool to oppress others. I get material from everything that influences my own life and other Iranians’ lives, including religion and religious symbolism. It’s about art more than anything, as far as I’m concerned, and my art doesn’t have an agenda—except freedom.”

A rebel and an underground artist, Shahin was always a thorn in the side of Iran’s ruling regime; his songs—critical of its mullahs—were highly popular with the country’s youth. In 2004, government thugs stormed one of his concerts in Bandar-e Anzali, his

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hometown. After performing his song “*Rish*” (“Beard”), Shahin was arrested and tortured while held captive, which prompted him to enter hiding before fleeing Iran for Germany in 2005.

Shahin and I discussed the similarity of Iran’s mullahs to the Muslim Brotherhood in my homeland, Egypt: both came to power after peaceful revolutions whose goals were freedom and justice; both took office by democratic means, only to dismantle democracy once in power; and both have installed religious dictatorships atop their societies, exhibiting allergic and wholly humorless reactions to the slightest criticism. In Egypt as in Iran, artists and satirists are persecuted and threatened alongside critics of religion—the latest example is comedian Bassem Youssef, known as the Jon Stewart of Egypt and targeted by the state both under the Muslim Brotherhood and Abdel Fattah el-Sisi alike (the latter took office after ousting the Brotherhood’s Mohamed Morsi).

Dictatorships survive on a diet of myth and public fear. Artists like Shahin Najafi attempt to erode such myths with wit and intelligence, leaving the public less afraid of those who rule them from on high; but doing so means he now lives under threat, as do all those who dare to question the regime’s foundations—if they remain alive at all.

Shahin refuses to be intimidated. Tonight, exactly one year later and in a packed room in the Berlin district of Kreuzberg, he plays his first concert since the fatwah against him was issued—the crowd, mostly Iranians in exile, go wild when he takes to the stage. With each song Shahin plays, his audience’s bond of solidarity with him becomes more palpable. “Shahin gets across everything Iran means to us,” one young Iranian woman says. “He can say in a sentence what other people would take a book to write.”

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Photographer Hamed Rowshangah keeps the singer in his sights at all times, hoping to capture Shahin's every fleeting gesture. "This man is a symbol for us," he tells me.⁴ "What he says about courage and finding joy in being alive—that speaks to young Iranians today. He shouts the same things a lot of people back there are too scared to say themselves. He fights back against the power of the clerics, against dictatorship. We love him for that."

The audience joins in with practically every song, knowing the words to all but Shahin's newest material. Again and again they demand, "Naghi! Naghi!"—but Shahin refuses to perform the song that brought a fatwah his way. *Is this an act of fear*, I find myself wondering, *or a desire to reconcile with the mullahs?* Of course not—Shahin is just saving the best for last. "Hey, Naghi!" he cries, finally, diving from the stage and into the crowd, which swallows him up, ocean-like.

"I'm a fish," Shahin tells me after the show. "The stage, the crowd—they're like water to me. I can't live without performing."⁵ His audience's gratitude and sheer joy in his presence bring him tremendous happiness, but his dearest wish is still to perform in a free Iran. What song, I ask him, would he sing first? "*Istadeh Mordan'*, I think," he answers, the song's title translating as "I'll Die on My Feet": Shahin wrote it during the dark times he went through following the fatwa. "For me and many of my people, that song is about resistance—and perhaps also being willing to fight to the death for your convictions."

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“WHAT KIND OF FAITH IS THAT? WHAT KIND OF GOD?”

Family bereavements often leave people pondering the meaning of life and death, sometimes discovering faith in the process. Nadya's had quite the opposite effect. A twenty-five-year-old Tunisian studying art, she enjoyed a close relationship with her grandfather since her childhood. There was no one, she says, whom he loved more than her. After his death in the summer of 2012, Nadya hoped to accompany his body to its burial site, but in keeping with Muslim tradition, the funeral excluded women. Taking umbrage, Nadya snuck in behind the procession, watching her grandfather's burial from behind a cemetery wall—a silent farewell rudely interrupted when a moralizing distant relative spotted her, bolted to her hiding place, and grabbed her. “Get out of my sight!” the relative spat. “You women are impure, and you've no business being here! Your presence will bring your grandfather nothing but pain. Get out!”

Nadya went home, wondering for the first time what her religion really meant to her. “What kind of faith is it that puts a wall between me and my grandfather?” she asks.⁶ “What kind of god gives a man the right to hit me?” Without stopping to think, Nadya shaved her head clean with scissors and a razor blade. “I cut myself off from religion when I cut my hair off.”

Nadya pauses, fishing a cigarette out of its packet and smoking it in silence. While her fellow Tunisians sit around their tables, laughing and swapping jokes, tears course down her face; Nadya eyes them with irritation. Disturbed to this day by what she went through in her homeland, she struggles to relax. Two years ago, she spent four weeks protesting in her country's streets against Ben

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Ali's dictatorial rule, demanding justice and human rights alongside hundreds of thousands of others. Nadya had no idea at the time that Islamists would take power soon after, enforcing a new social order of their own.

In the past, faith played only a minor role in Tunisian public life, with politics and religion kept strictly separate. Today, even "hard-core communists" hesitate to voice a belief in *laïcité* (secularism). After the deaths of leftist politician Chokri Belaïd in February 2013 and much-loved parliamentarian Mohamed Brahmi in July of that year, fear mounted among Tunisia's opposition and secular intellectuals, as self-censorship became a means of avoiding persecution. Two of Nadya's fellow artists were jailed for eight years when they shared *Charlie Hebdo's* caricatures of Muhammad online. A climate of silence muffled public outrage over the sentencing. Nadya tells me she feels ashamed of Tunisia; the birthplace of the Arab Spring has succumbed to a new dictatorship.

The Islamist Ennahda ("Resistance") Party won over 40 percent of the vote in Tunisia's first free elections, being both well-organized as well as backed by countless religious zealots in the country's streets. After hiding for decades on the outskirts of its major towns—"like rats," Nadya says—the party captured Tunisia's inner cities after the revolution, setting about "Islamizing" them at a rapid pace. Female Islamists grew just as active as their male colleagues, regularly harassing Nadya on public transport, both for looking like a man and for not wearing a *hijab*. "I'm discriminated against in that society on three different levels," she says. "First as an atheist, then as a woman, then as a woman who looks like a man."

After their electoral victory, Tunisian Salafists mounted sus-

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tained attacks on its bars, brothels, and nightclubs. Even Manouba's state university came under attack; Salafists tore down the country's flag and hoisted an al-Qaeda banner in its place. While they may not have been Ennahda's own thugs, the party has tolerated them and their ilk, carefully using them both to keep its opponents in fear and to market itself to Western onlookers as a moderate alternative.

Struggling at times to face the reality of all this, Nadya turns to the online world for comfort and is active on a nonreligious Facebook page with her boyfriend, Alaa. While at least five hundred members congregate there to exchange ideas, she finds it hard to believe that Tunisian atheists can surge the way their Egyptian counterparts did, as they are gripped by fear and, at times, apathy. Many now hope for Ben Ali's return, since the dictator always stressed that he would protect Tunisians from Islamists—a nostalgia Nadya finds tantamount to an admission of bankruptcy.

Young Tunisians, she says, no longer use the Internet to organize collectively or arrange protests—only to vent their frustrations. No one, she continues, has a point of view anymore, and many people her age turn to drugs. “I’ve no idea,” she tells me, “how my country’s going to get through this. I know one thing for sure, though—there’s no way I’m bringing kids into this world.” Making that decision must have been hard for her, I respond. She says, “It’s a defeat, but I have to face up to that.”

I sit across from Nadya, lost for words and afraid to end our conversation on such a bleak note but unsure what to say. “No one would ever have thought there’d be a democratic Arab uprising,” I offer after a while. “And no one would have thought Tunisians would be the first to act. Perhaps there’ll be a second wave yet.”

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The Middle East's culture, I tell her, is a multiple dictatorship, one dictatorship overthrown only for another to replace it—but persevere, and we can overthrow them all.

I still have no idea if I was comforting her or myself.

THE VALUE OF FREEDOM

After a talk I gave at Zurich's Neumarkt Theater in May 2013, two wholly different men came up to me. Nicolas Blancho,⁷ age thirty, grew up in a liberal, nonreligious home in German-speaking Biel, Switzerland; he then converted to Islam and became a Salafist after time in the city's punk and hip-hop scenes. In contrast, Kacem El Ghazzali,⁸ age twenty-three, was born to a conservative Muslim Moroccan family, and he has been working since 2011 to champion his country's atheists while living in Switzerland.

Blancho, Swiss-born, sought rules and moral guidance to live by in a world of freedom and tolerance, finding them in the strictures of orthodox Islam. In April 2010, a former teacher of his, Alain Pichard, told Swiss-German newspaper the *Tages-Anzeiger* that Blancho had been a lackluster pupil “who seemed unfocused, almost adrift.”⁹ Only on his conversion did Blancho manage to pass his school's exit exams, going on to study law with Islamic studies at the University of Bern.

Ghazzali, for his part, chose to leave Islam, finding its inflexible rules and his homeland's moralism suffocating. Boarding at a Qur'anic school near Casablanca when he was younger, the Moroccan was made to dress in the distinctive white of Salafism; Western clothing was strictly forbidden, but a brave new world was revealed to him the day his father bought him a PC. Kacem

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spent hours at the keyboard, reading things in the blogosphere that had been off-limits at his school and mosque; he eagerly absorbed everything from Darwinism to world literature and encountered a new culture of information and discussion. In class and at the mosque, pedagogy was a top-down process; the teacher or imam expected pupils to internalize their pronouncements in silence. Online, on the other hand, education became interactive, with authorities no longer compelling him to swallow their claims.

Not content merely to convert, Blancho founded the Islamic Central Council of Switzerland to train young people in Salafism. More recently, his work has included campaigns for sharia in Switzerland, advocating a justice system whose laws mandate—among other things—stoning of women for adultery and death for apostates. Today Blancho has learned to choose his words with care, calling stoning one of his faith’s “core elements and values” yet deeming it inappropriate in a Swiss context. Conflicting views exist on the activities of his Central Council; for example, the controversial expert on Islam Tariq Ramadan dubbed Blancho and his colleagues “baseless sectarians” who were “on the fringe of the Islamic landscape.”¹⁰ Certainly the group is far from representative of the majority of Swiss Muslims. “The Islamic Central Council,” head of Swiss intelligence Markus Seiler stated in 2010, “are ideological extremists but not violent ones.”¹¹

Seiler’s comments ignore that even when they refuse to preach it openly, Wahhabists—followers of Blancho’s stripe of Islam—enable acts of violence. To call someone both an unbelieving sinner and an equal citizen is doublespeak; the former statement is dehumanizing by definition, and the belief that people who sin deserve to stew in hell is an inherent denial of their right to exist.

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In Morocco, Kacem was physically beaten in the name of sharia, receiving numerous death threats before being forced to leave the country. Becoming a human-rights activist, he fights to this day for freedom of belief and against those seeking to radicalize Switzerland's Muslims. "I didn't flee sharia in Morocco to see Switzerland introduce it," he tells me, incensed.

While their chance meeting at my talk in my Zurich was Kacem's first face-to-face encounter with Blanco, the two had clashed indirectly several months earlier. When the Islamic Central Council invited the radical Saudi preacher Mohamed al-Arefe to give a lecture in Fribourg, Kacem campaigned successfully to prevent his admission to the country, citing then-recent television appearances where the al-Arefe had endorsed a man's right to assault his wife, had claimed European women had sex with dogs, and had stated that 55 percent of Danish women had no clue who fathered their children. Today Kacem is mystified that anyone of Blanco's background could fail to value the freedom in which he grew up—as well as about what the primitive views of men like al-Arefe could offer someone well-versed in Kant and Voltaire.

The evening of my talk, an argument flared up between the two. When Blanco stated that he sees nothing mutually exclusive about Swiss law and Islamic jurisprudence, Kacem brought up polygamy, which is permitted in Islam but banned in Switzerland. "The law nowadays allows two men to get married," Blanco replied. "If you support that, you have to support a Muslim man's right to get married to more than one woman. That's called equality." The frequency with which Salafists misuse concepts like freedom and equality in this way is as interesting as it is striking, since they rarely mention either except when it aids their agenda.

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I found myself wondering whether I might have slipped into a mirror universe, where jean-clad Moroccans cited Kant and fought for freedom while Swiss nationals sang the praises of radical desert-dwelling preachers, dreaming of an Islamic state like those of the Middle Ages. In early April 2012, Kacem was invited to address the United Nations' Geneva Summit for Human Rights on the topic of freedom of belief in Morocco; in mid-June the same year, Blanche was invited to a Salafist meeting in Cairo, calling on young Muslims across the world to join the Syrian jihad.

NO GOD BUT MICKEY MOUSE

When Egypt and Tunisia deposed their own dictators, Morocco's royal family, on edge, chose to permit a gentler and less bloody revolution. Students and Islamists alike had taken to the streets, demanding reform, but their anger was with the country's left-wing government, not with the popular monarch Mohammed VI. To placate the demonstrators, a new and ostensibly liberal constitution was drafted at lightning speed; free elections were held immediately, and Islamists were allowed to form a national government for the first time in Moroccan history. To test out the new constitution's promises of freedom of conscience and religion, millennial blogger Imad Iddine Habib¹² announced the formation of the Central Council of Ex-Muslims of Morocco; but then the nation's highest council of scholars—part of its constitutional makeup and personally chaired by King Mohammed—permitted fatwahs against apostates only a week later, including those fatwahs that demanded their death.

Habib knows no Moroccan court would actually sentence an

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apostate to death; Mohammed is too hesitant by far to risk his reformist image in the West. Allowing fatwahs was, he suggests, little more than a cheap attempt on the government's part to flirt with Islamists. What made it dangerous for him was that religious zealots felt empowered to murder apostates themselves wherever they came across them. "What are the courts meant to do with them, then?" he asks.¹³ "They were just doing what some fatwah or other said God wanted."

Refusing to be cowed, Habib decided to stage another stunt, exposing his country's new constitution once and for all for the farce it was. Working with Kacem El Ghazzali, the ex-Muslim exiled in Zurich, he founded the *Masayminsh*—"fasting-free"—initiative. "Part of religious freedom is being able to shirk religious duties," he tells me, his movement having not only called for a general boycott of the month of Ramadan, but also organized public meetings for nonbelievers. When authorities heard its ideas had proved popular with young people, orders for Habib's arrest were issued and he was hounded by Moroccan police; his family members turned their backs on him, and even secular friends accused of him of having gone too far. Mere months from finishing his degree at the country's Institute of Physiotherapy, Habib was forced to go into hiding without money or future prospects. Had he been apprehended, he could have faced up to fifteen years in jail.

When we met in Casablanca, I struggled to believe Imad Iddine Habib was only twenty-two years old. The man in front of me seemed older, embittered, and stressed, disillusioned above all with friends who called themselves liberals and human-rights campaigners but distanced themselves from him while accusing him of damaging their cause with acts of "needless provocation"

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and claiming the world—Morocco, at least—not to be ready for him. “If no one ever thinks the world’s ready,” he says, “the world will never *be* ready. Someone has to be the first to speak out. I want freedom while I’m still alive.”

Habib was an atheist by the time he turned fourteen. During Qur’an lessons, his tutor had told him tales of hellfire and agony, which gave him lasting nightmares—“I’d have done anything to break free from that fear,” he tells me. “In the end, I had no option but to reject the Qur’an itself. One night I just said to myself, ‘There is no god. The Qur’an is just a book some man in the desert wrote.’ Admitting that to myself set me free. I never had nightmares or felt guilty again.” Because leaving religion was so easy for him, Habib fails to understand why millions of believers make their own lives more difficult in the name of a god he deems fictitious, some from backgrounds like his even killing others. “Religion is a form of surveillance,” he says. “And surveillance leads to paranoia—it leads to schizophrenia. Just take a look at our society—most of its people are mentally ill.”

Morocco is home to countless atheists, but most move almost exclusively in online circles. Those who out themselves in the flesh face immediate persecution, as the faith that claims to hold ultimate truth is unable to stomach the slightest criticism. “If there were a god,” Habib asks, “would he really mind me not believing in him?” Ultimately, he adds, the issue is the power wielded by those who act in God’s name. Religion is the basis of Morocco’s monarchy; its king draws legitimacy from his status as “Head of the Faith,” not least during periods of unrest. It follows that anyone who doubts religion’s inviolability also doubts his divine right to rule. “The king probably thinks the same as me about Islam,”

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chuckles Habib. “He just can’t admit it. Honestly, why would he want to? He profits from people’s ignorance more than anyone.”

Habib tells me that several weeks ago, desperate, he sought a favor from a friend at a global human-rights lobby group. The concerned friend explained remorsefully that there was nothing he could do, as Habib had become a slave to his own obsessions. Then he recommended that Habib see a psychiatrist about his delusions or post “There is no god but Allah” on Facebook, stating there was now no other way left to save his soul. Tired and disenchanted, Habib went back into hiding, opening his laptop at the first opportunity and declaring via his Facebook page, “There is no god but Mickey Mouse.”

CHAPTER 10

SALAFISTS, JIHADISTS, AND ISLAMIC FASCISM IN EUROPE

Lamya Kaddor has seen her parents' country reduced to a battlefield. Born to a Syrian family, she works as an Islamic educator in Germany, and she follows the war in her homeland with passionate interest. The conflict ravaging it is brutal, but which side is attacking which and why becomes less clear every day. Can we still refer to a civil war in Syria—or has the conflict now become a proxy war?

Fighters in Syria today receive orders not from Aleppo, Damascus, or Hama, but from Tehran, Riyadh, and Moscow. ISIS fighters come from Lebanon, Iraq, Kuwait, Algeria, and Morocco, indeed from all over the world; most of the Islamic State's forces hail from Tunisia, the Arab Spring's founding nation, and Saudi Arabia, supporter of the West's "war on terror." Others come from countries like Germany; intelligence agencies estimated in late 2013 that five hundred or more Islamists had left Germany to join the Syrian jihad since the conflict began. From Europe as a whole, some five thousand people are now thought to have joined the fray.¹

Today, having overtaken all other Middle Eastern conflict zones as a recruitment ground for Islamists, Syria is a magnet for adventure-seeking jihadists, much as Iraq was only a few years ago. To her abject horror, Lamya Kaddor learned that five of her

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own ex-pupils—young men who never previously showed any interest in Islam—had joined the Syrian jihad. “They had girlfriends,” she tells me.² “Every one of them. They drank alcohol, they took drugs—Syria certainly wasn’t part of any of their lives. They weren’t even Arabs! Four of them were Turkish, the other was Kosovan-Albanian.”

How did five young men from North Rhine-Westphalia end up as armed jihadists in Syria, and who or what made them choose that fate? “I think they just don’t get what the conflict’s about,” Lamya says. “They may not even care—the key thing is, it offers them a vocation.” All five, she tells me, left school with qualifications but struggled to secure a job. “If you’re a testosterone-fueled seventeen-year-old who fits all the stereotypes—a Muslim, a migrant, someone from the wrong side of town—you’re going to feel discriminated against, both because of your background and in terms of society’s realities for you. If you already feel abandoned and adrift, why wouldn’t you turn to violence in response?”

All five young men held criminal records, some with multiple convictions, whether for bodily assault, theft, or drug possession. At some point, Lamya guesses, an affable Salafist must have moved in, sensing their powerlessness and desperation and offering “a meaningful afternoon’s work.” Unlike the rest of our society, which eyes young men like them as a burden, he might well have let them know they were valued—that Islam needed them, or that they had the power to change the world, thereby bolstering their self-esteem and giving meaning to their lives.

In Germany and elsewhere in Europe, Salafists and other breeds of fundamentalist are filling a void. Often the first to note their recruits’ potential, they lure the young Muslims they target

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with the promise of a life of achievement. As the world turns at breakneck speed, with European states failing to meet all their own people's needs, thousands fall through the net; they are left behind and unable to catch up, bereft of both financial prospects and moral or emotional direction. Salafists offer these young men's lives structure, encouraging them to pray in groups five times a day or study the work of well-known Saudi or Egyptian Salafists together, viewing videos of German pop-Salafists like Pierre Vogel. Their methods marry elitist teaching of the Qur'an with the use of new media and youthspeak, including the latter's vulgarities. More on that later.

Young men like Lamya's ex-pupils admire the figure of the Salafist. He is looked up to in his own communities, appears to be one of them, and has achieved what they hope to achieve: rehabilitating himself through sheer religiosity—cleansing himself of past sins while making a name for himself in devotion to faith. A reformed criminal, their mentor is someone who followed his calling and seems to have *made it*. "These boys want that," says Lamya Kaddor. "In social and religious terms, what they want most is to get and stay clean."

Egyptian sheikh Abu Ishaq al-Heweny, one of the world's most influential Salafists, served as Pierre Vogel's mentor on his many visits to Germany's aspiring Salafists. German authorities consider al-Heweny a moderate, classifying Vogel and his peers as radical but drawing a sharp distinction between Salafists and jihadists. Like head of Swiss intelligence Markus Seiler, they claim that the former group is nonviolent, since Vogel et al. insist constantly that they stand opposed to terrorism. The question is, when does an ideology become violent?

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Lamya Kaddor is a progressive Muslim trailblazer in Germany, founding the country's Liberal Islamic Association as a beacon of opposition to radical currents in Islam. (Five of her own pupils' defection to Salafism must have come as a bitter defeat.) Lamya rejects the partition of the world's people into believers and unbelievers, siding with reform theologians like Mouhanad Khorchide, professor of Islamic theology at the University of Münster, whose quest to forge a twenty-first-century Muslim theology puts him at odds with Islamic groups.

Khorchide longs to see a benevolent and loving god spoken of in Islamic religious instruction, rather than one obsessed with punishment. Wishful thinking though it might seem, Khorchide is an earnest young man in dogged pursuit of reform. German Islamic groups have been sufficiently rattled by his efforts to date that several demanded he be banned from teaching Islam on German campuses. The students training under him today, after all, will shape the teaching of Islam tomorrow, both as teachers in German schools and preaching in the country's mosques. His approach to competing faiths is conciliatory, maintaining that Jews, Christians, and followers of other religions can earn God's love if they lead good lives. Khorchide has even found support for this in the Qur'an—and depending on how scripture is construed, it certainly is possible to find verses that aid social cohesion.

Lamya Kaddor endorses Khorchide's stance. Pierre Vogel, by contrast, pronounced in a YouTube lecture, "Anyone who says Jews and Christians are not *kuffar* ["unbelievers"] is a *kafir* ["unbeliever"] themselves."³

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THE FIRST STEP TO VIOLENCE

Some Salafists argue that *kafir* is a harmless term, meaning simply someone of differing beliefs—Muslims themselves, disputing Christ’s divinity and the rightness of Jewish ritual law, being *kuffar* from a Christian or Jewish point of view. To understand how dangerous the term really is, one need only listen to what Vogel’s mentor al-Heweny says of *kuffar*: the Egyptian is on record stating, “a *kafir* is lower than an animal,” citing the Qur’an in his defense just as Khorchide does.⁴ “And what do we do with animals?” asks al-Heweny. “We ride them. We take them to market and sell them. We slaughter them and then we eat them.”

To utter a word like *kafir* is to embark on the first step to violence, treating those with different beliefs or ideas like animals and paving the road to acts of terrorism and murder. Videos all over the Internet show the Islamic State’s soldiers slitting their victims’ throats with cries of “*Allahu Akbar*”—“God is great.” When slaughtering actual animals in accordance with Islamic law, halal butchers utter the same words. Preachers like Vogel may not openly endorse violence, but their social views and treatment of others legitimize it, strengthening the spiritual framework behind Islamist terrorism. My own view is that Europe needs to ban Salafist groups—no ifs, no buts—on the same basis as far-right parties. As fascism’s history testifies, atrocities begin with words—and what could ever be more fascist than calling one’s fellow humans animals for slaughter?

Salafists may not all be jihadists, but the fact is that jihadists begin as Salafists. When the Islamic State executed Jordanian pilot Muath al-Kasasbeh by burning him alive, its members quoted Ibn

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Taymiyyah, the medieval scholar whose work *The Drawn Sword against Those Who Insult the Messenger* argues that killing those who defame the Prophet is every Muslim's religious duty, citing 250 statements from Muhammad's own biography. To this day, Ibn Taymiyyah is an iconic Salafist figure, and the movement's scholars quote him more often than they do the Qur'an.

Commonplace though it is, the argument that banning Salafist groups would only enhance their appeal seems to me untenable. Many young Muslims are drawn to Salafism precisely because it operates within the law, such as those with prior convictions like Lamya Kaddor's five ex-pupils who joined up in hopes of rehabilitation. Were Salafist associations outlawed, prospective members would at least know that joining them runs the risk of punishment—which might be enough to make at least some stop and think before crossing Salafism's threshold. While those already ensnared may not care what society thinks of them, others still hovering on the doorstep might well think twice if Salafism were against the law. Not every last one of them, granted—but every young Muslim whom a ban deterred would be a victory.

As well as attacking unbelievers, al-Heweny offers his followers innovative solutions to the Islamic world's economic stagnation, demanding renewed military conquests against unbelievers, with their assets seized and woman and children sold as slaves.⁵ Blaming mass neglect for the Muslim duty of jihad, al-Heweny—again, supposedly a moderate—claims that an armed assault or two every year against unbelievers would cause poverty to vanish once and for all from Islamic countries. In Syria and Iraq, the Islamic State's treatment of Christians and Yazidi Kurds already shows what these ideas look like once implemented.

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Footage of preachers like al-Heweny broadcasting these kinds of messages is standard viewing material for Salafist recruits, along with brutal film clips of Muslims who have died in conflicts like the Syrian jihad. Even in death, the casualties' faces appear to smile. "Because of those films," Lamyia Kaddor tells me, "young people with no clue about the political situation in the region believe Muslims are being oppressed and that this has to be fought. It's always the same narrative: no matter where they live in the world, Muslims are permanently oppressed, and armed warfare is the tried and tested solution."

The deadly combination of willing victimhood and hunger for retribution now serves as Islamism's most powerful motor, with endless cases of undeniable oppression of Muslims unearthed and pointed to in all manner of conflicts, whether historically between Israelis and Arabs, more generally between the West and the Islamic world, or in war zones like Bosnia, Chechnya, and Syria today. Over time, however, radicalization has taken on a new dimension, reaching a wider audience than ever.

THREE FORMS OF RADICALIZATION

In a 2006 paper on radicalization of young German Muslims, I drew a distinction between three forms of radicalization. The first, "archaic conservatism," often occurs in migrant populations from rural, patriarchal regions where levels of education are low and outdated tribal customs are still implemented. While not necessarily religious in and of itself, this kind of conservatism often employs religious ideas to justify certain views and practices. Violence in the atmosphere it creates is rarely targeted outward at its adherents' country

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of residence—on the contrary, “apostates” from diaspora communities (women in particular) are those it threatens most gravely, as they fall victim to family violence supposedly for threatening their households’ image of stable integrity. Characterized by strict moral or behavioral standards, as well as expectations of unquestioning family loyalty, archaic conservatism is a strain of radicalization that, at its most extreme, prompts “honor” killings and forced marriages.

Young people with fragile upbringings are especially susceptible to radicalization of a second kind—one I choose to call “escapism”—as they have neither family members nor the rest of their society providing adequate living standards. Frustration, alienation, and underemployment force young men in particular to turn to criminality and violence, whether for the short or long term, while social cliques serve a supportive role by offering each member a chance to “be somebody.” Whether in the Neukölln area, Copenhagen’s Nørrebro neighborhood, or the Swedish city of Malmö—whether in Brussels, Birmingham, or the banlieues of France’s capital—the phenomenon exists everywhere. Also not principally driven by religion, its primary cause is usually the social placement of those affected, though religion often comes into play when, for instance, turf wars break out—Muslim Turkish and Moroccan youths uniting against secular German or Russian rivals, to cite one example.

Finally, followers of “religious avant-gardism” tend to keep their distance from traditional Islamic groups, viewing themselves as trailblazers of a theocratic revolution. This form of radicalization in particular seems to lure Arab students and German converts alike; isolated from family for the first time, they are easy targets for extremists.

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The difference between support for domestic “Islamization” and calls to mobilize for global jihad becomes important here. Salafists and jihadists, followers of two rival avant-gardist movements, once kept each other at arm’s length, with each group viewing itself as an elite faction, mainly recruiting young, middle-class Muslims they deemed sound-minded and who had academic qualifications. Salafists were once apolitical, yearning to transform Muslim societies through moralism rather than by political means—indeed, a strong taboo against dirtying one’s own hands on politics held sway in Salafism. Salafists, unlike jihadists, also distanced themselves from acts of violence.

Increased tensions between Saudi Salafists and the mullahs of Iran make this distinction meaningless today. Both Middle Eastern powers have been active in multiple Arab conflicts; a proxy war between both sects’ adherents has flared up more destructively in Syria than anywhere else to date. Iran’s regime has backed Assad; Saudi Arabia is siding with Islamist rebels; and Salafists from Islamic states and the West alike—even those who once had no time for Arab conflicts—are sending in fighters at the Saudis’ request, if only to keep Iran in check. Shiite minorities, meanwhile, who enjoyed centuries of peaceful Sunnite rule in states like Yemen, Pakistan, and Egypt, now find themselves attacked by Salafists.

There was a time when Salafists—well-educated, respectably employed, and generally speaking traditional Standard Arabic—had to undergo years of theological training prior to being recognized in religious circles. Today’s Salafism upholds none of these earlier standards. Its elitist spheres widen to profit from young Muslims’ frustrations in both the Islamic world and the West. Converts, criminals, the unemployed—Salafism’s doors are now open

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to all as a crash course in Islam replaces the intensive training of decades past. Those who complete it are eligible to fight as fully paid-up jihadists within weeks. The days of choice wording are over and done with, too; today's Salafists seem to prefer the language of the street, vulgarities included, on their recruitment drives, which serves to allay young people's suspicions. The line between escapism and avant-gardism has now, it appears, become blurred—an unholy union that young German converts seem to find just as beguiling.

Where once Germans came to Islam via mysticism, drawn in particular to Sufism's promise of refuge from mounting Western materialism and nihilism, Salafism—partly due to styling itself as a protest movement—enjoys drastically more success today. In their youth, many Germans went punk for a year or two, joining left-wing or right-wing groups to vent their discontent with society and its ruling political system. Today, Salafism seems better placed to amplify many young Germans' anger with and resentment of the world around them. "I'm not like you," they declare, changing their appearance, donning white clothing and growing long beards to send their society a signal. "Listen to me." "Fear me." "I'm not a victim." "I'm empowered."

To glance at Britain, Belgium, France, the Netherlands, or Denmark today is to see this phenomenon at work, as young Muslims cut themselves off further and further from their wider societies to live in a world of their own. British Salafists like Anjem Choudary openly promote jihad, calling for Western democracies' fall and the formation of a European Islamic state.⁶ In central London, sharia courts have produced a parallel justice system, a form of apartheid justice the Church of England tolerates, dubbing

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it a symbol of tolerance—not out of any love for Muslims, but because it aids Christian institutions to justify having more influence over the education and justice systems in Britain.

In Germany, so-called *Friedensrichter*—“justices of the peace”—work to ensure disputes among Muslims never end up in court; widely praised as a form of mediation, this adds up to the implementation of archaic, ultra-religious social norms, bypassing constitutional law. Women’s rights, enshrined in Western democracies, receive short shrift in these arbitration systems, which—operating under sharia law or following tribal customs—are patriarchal in the extreme.

In the name of a tolerant society, a status quo is accepted throughout central Europe that fosters radicalization, fractures societies, and encourages the emergence of parallel societies. The consequences risk proving fatal, not just for Muslim women and religious moderates but also for the respective countries’ national security and social cohesion. Communities and governments alike tend to react too late; they wait until radicals have long since become unreachable or extremists rule whole parts of cities like London under Islamic law, or until a bomb has just gone off somewhere or innocent passers-by have been murdered in the street.

No one who lets Salafists preach antidemocratic, antihuman sermons of hate in public has the right to be surprised when, sooner or later, their messages lead to violence. The fuse is always lit in the hearts and minds of young Muslims long before a train, marketplace, or synagogue goes up in smoke.

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STEMMING THE TIDE OF RADICALIZATION

Most of Europe's Muslims are apolitical, simply wanting the best for their children, and many are secular in practice. A blanket view of all Muslims as terrorists-in-waiting is as dangerous as it is wrong. Indeed, a generalized suspicion of Muslims or open hostility toward them can spur violence as easily as can Islamic radicalization. But those in this silent majority are the ones we need to hear from. They are able to oppose extremists, yet they fail to mobilize against the mounting influence of Salafists and conservative Islamic groups. As a result, campaigners for reform like Mouhanad Khorchide and Lamya Kaddor are left to fend for themselves, while those in the peaceful Muslim majority look on as they give up, exhausted. Every time this happens in Germany, a minority of non-Muslims claims in turn that no Islamic reformers exist, painting "Vogelists" and jihadists as the only faces of Islam and thereby being labeled racist and discriminatory in turn by apolitical Muslims. On and on the vicious cycle continues.

Based in the former communist town of Dresden, Germany's newest anti-Islam group goes by the acronym PEGIDA—in English, Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the West—and calls for a crackdown on immigration from Muslim countries. "Islam is part of Germany," Chancellor Angela Merkel insisted, responding to the group's formation somewhat vaguely and without stating which Islam she meant.⁷ On mentioning Islamic fascism, I often find myself interrogated over my own reference to Islam, interlocutors demanding to know which version of it I mean, yet Germany's Muslims failed to ask Merkel the same, seeming not to mind which parts of their faith she had in mind—whether the Islam

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she praised so highly was that of jihad, sharia, and gender apartheid (the faith of conservative Islamic groups bankrolled from Turkey and Saudi Arabia) or that of reformists like Mouhanad Khorchide.

Within a week of Merkel's comments on Islam, armed Islamists massacred staff at *Charlie Hebdo*'s offices. At a mass rally for free speech and solidarity with France in front of Berlin's Brandenburg Gate, Merkel herself showed up. Curiously, reformist theologians like Khorchide and critics of Islam were conspicuously uninvited, while figureheads from conservative Islamic groups appeared in their place—those who consistently oppose efforts to reform the faith and instead call for the reintroduction of Germany's blasphemy laws to punish those who defamed their prophet. Precious few Muslims, meanwhile, could be glimpsed in the crowd.

I can certainly see why “ordinary” Muslims might wish not to be interrogated over their faith (at least not its unsavory parts), and that Muslim students in Cologne or Berlin bear no responsibility for terrorist acts in Afghanistan or the stoning of women in Iran. With Muslims taking to the streets in great numbers, however, to protest against caricatures of Muhammad or anti-Islamic films, my expectation is that just as many ought to demonstrate against the growing influence of Islamic groups and Salafists. In the end, the issue is as much their children's future in society as their religion's image.

We also need to hear from the state, whose officials could, if they wished, choose not to empower Islamic groups. Much of the time, those who lobby and organize in the name of religion do so in hopes of preserving a theocratic vision of society, gaining more traction within their own faith once legitimized at the state level.

Collectively, Muslim progressives organize in large groups far less often than do Muslim conservatives, since generally they

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don't strive for power and political influence. Orthodox Islamic groups exploit this by painting themselves as the face of Islam when no one dares stand up to them, either by counter-organizing or by contradicting them. Debates over Islamic religious instruction, exemption of Muslim schoolgirls from swimming lessons, and the wearing of headscarves by teachers and civil servants have been initiated by these Islamic groups. In the aftermath of September 11, 2001, the German state afforded them increased clout in its attempts at dialogue with Muslims. In itself, of course, dialogue is only right and proper, but where Muslims had once gathered in the common rooms of small local mosques, now ethnic groups like Turks, Iranians, and Moroccans keep to themselves in the main, while Muslims as a whole are encouraged to institutionalize as newly formed groups claim- to represent them as a monolith.

In contrast to the United States and France, Germany went on a different path of secularization in the nineteenth century. In order to guarantee the loyalty of the Lutheran-Protestant and the Catholic churches, the German state made a commitment to collect church-taxes from the citizens and hand it to the churches. Additionally, the churches were allowed to keep their influence over media, religious teaching at schools, and in faculties of theology in German universities, as well as keeping their own health and charity centers. These privileges have not changed until today. This institutionalization has proved to be problematic. Islamic groups have cited the country's so-called church-and-state clause—a legal settlement more clearly the product of historical circumstance than any during the last century—in hopes of recognition as corporate bodies under public law like Christian churches and Jewish community groups. After their disestablishment, Germany's churches

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were compensated for their losses by the state, which took it upon itself to collect taxes for them while offering the churches a role in public health and education in return. In keeping with formal separation of church and state, German governments are required to display “neutrality concerning worldviews”—but since the functions performed by religious groups under the church-and-state clause are deemed “public” rather than “state” services, the government officially continues to promote certain religious organizations and worldviews by supporting their agenda both financially and politically.

Twenty-first century societies grow more diverse and multicultural by the day, and immigrants are individuals first and foremost; they have individual rights and needs—education, employment, civil rights—before collective ones. It does Muslims no favors, in my view, to politically empower Islamic groups, handing Islam the same constitutional role that Germany’s Christian churches currently fulfill, while doing nothing to fight latent, pervasive anti-Muslim sentiment, indeed fanning the flames of resentment and mistrust. The answer, at least as I see it, is precisely not to give Muslim groups the same privileges as German churches, but for the churches to relinquish them, handing back some of their public roles to the state. The church-and-state clause may once have been justifiable, but in my view it fails to meet the twenty-first century’s demands.

The duty of the state ought to be ensuring unbiased transmission of knowledge, equipping children with the tools for critical thinking but not presenting ready-made religious “truths”—whether via Protestant, Catholic, or Islamic religious instruction. Religious studies strikes me as a crucial discipline, somewhere for children to find out about different religions’ origins, teachings, and col-

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lective customs—but no more and no less. Calling on Muslims, as I do, to reexamine their own traditions also means calling on the German state to reexamine its relationship with the country’s churches; an overemphasis on religion, whichever one, puts free and open dialogue at risk by poisoning the public well.

Instead of bestowing Islamic groups with legal privilege, Germany sorely needs to give young Muslims better life chances. Plenty of ethnic Turks have found that their names alone stop them from getting job interviews, or else prompt human-resources staff to voice amazement at the quality of their German. These barriers—and they’re not just psychological ones—need to be torn down. This would achieve more than any number of conferences on Islam—much more, indeed, than Chancellor Merkel’s clearly gestural statement that Islam is “part of Germany.” The same applies to Barack Obama’s defense of Islam in February 2015, when he dubbed it “a religion that preaches peace” and making reference to the Crusades.⁸

The job of politicians is to represent their citizens, not praise, criticize, defend, or otherwise evaluate religions in which they may or may not believe, much less to relativize current atrocities in the name of Islam with reference to the Crusades, implying that today’s Muslims and their religion, being unworthy of judgment by the standards of their own time, need to be assessed by medieval ones. Neither Christianity’s Crusades nor its Inquisition were consigned to its cultural past by being compared with the atrocities of the Mongols, and Western societies would look rather different today had witch-burnings been downplayed in this manner, with neither Merkel as Germany’s Chancellor nor Hillary Clinton as the presumptive heiress to the White House.

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Citing violent passages from the Bible to relativize those in the Qur'an, as many do, is a fool's errand; it does Muslims no good to insist that, terrible as their holy texts may be, other people's are too. In any case, the individual passages themselves are less problematic by far than the status conferred on them by believers. Christians today who view the Bible as God's unadulterated and inerrant word are rightly labeled fundamentalists, while Muslims who think the same of the Qur'an are simply considered Muslims. For this exact reason, poking fun at Jesus is commonplace, while mocking Muhammad remains taboo—a privilege claimed by Muslims and upheld by non-Muslim commentators who refer constantly to true Islam while obscuring the truth about Islam. This is not how progress happens.

All sides of the debate have further to go. Muslims must learn to respond differently to criticism of their religion and non-Muslims must learn to accept dark-skinned followers of Islam as fellow Europeans. Time is no guarantee of change, of course, and our society is not a utopia, given the problems of the Islamic world now surfacing in Europe, which jeopardize social cohesion and foster mutual antagonism. My hope has long been that young Muslims growing up today amid freedom and prosperity and enjoying the benefits of a thoroughly modern education will import liberal values back into the Islamic world. Yet both the ideological and structural issues of Muslim communities, as well as widespread European attitudes toward Muslims, suggest the opposite is happening.

Today, regressive views and customs are being preached among the grandchildren of Germany's first *Gastarbeiter* (migrant workers), some of them now antediluvian even in Casablanca

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and Istanbul. While opposition to Islamic fascism is on the rise in Islamic countries, as demonstrated by the Muslim Brotherhood's downfall in Egypt, Salafism's backward and fascist ideas boast ever more supporters in the West. The virus of jihad is most contagious at home, and it is mutating faster than people know.

Victory in the long term will mean a long, arduous struggle on both fronts. Lethargy, apathy, and silence are as toxic and dangerous for Europe as Islamic fascism itself, and neither gestures nor lip service will get us anywhere. The debate on Islam must be allowed to neither scaremonger nor stoke suspicion of all Muslims, for nothing will be achieved if communities wall themselves off. Instead, it must be a debate about religion's public influence in general—one that emboldens us to seek a more secular Germany.

CHAPTER 11

POLARIZATION AND SOCIAL CLEANSING— WHAT THILO SARRAZIN AND RECEP TAYYIP ERDOĞAN HAVE IN COMMON

Five years after the publication of Thilo Sarrazin's bestseller *Deutschland schafft sich ab* (The Abolition of Germany), I find myself unsure what the debate over Islam and social integration has done except to stoke fear, spur indignation, and provoke outrage. Sarrazin is the former finance minister of the state of Berlin and a former CEO of the German federal bank (Deutsche Bundesbank). In his book, he warns that Muslim immigrants are exploiting the German social system and degrading the educational standards. According to him, Islam will take over the power structures in Germany within the next hundred years. Despite taking exception to Sarrazin's controversial remarks on intelligence and genetics, there was a time when I still reassured myself that his rabble-rousing merely highlighted failed policies on education and society, clinging to hopes that an honest debate might result from his book's impact, with controversy giving way to catharsis. Yet neither the debate nor the controversy has abated; mutual distrust and polarization have only sharpened.

Sarrazin's admirers laud him for striking a raw nerve, enabling

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overdue discussion of taboo topics, while his detractors counter that he just *gets on* their nerves, inflaming tensions and threatening social cohesion. The former senator for finance seems an almost supernatural sensation in his native Germany, single-handedly dominating debates on integration for the last few years despite identifying only a handful of problems without offering answers. Sarrazin has provoked a storm of emotions—not, in my view, because his policy stances contain a grain of truth, but because for scores of Germans with long-term grievances he cuts an appealing figure. Both sides of the conflict—Muslims and anti-Islamic groups—are united, tellingly, by a shared sense of media mistreatment.

“Finally,” excited Sarrazin fans tell each other, “someone is telling the truth about Islam!”—standing by the author through thick and thin, though few of them have actually read his book. Under fire, they reflexively claim that the media is all the same, set on protecting Islam’s image and veiling its capacity for violence—as well as that no one in Germany nowadays is allowed to criticize it, with Sarrazin and others who try silenced immediately.

“We feel so unwelcome,” the Muslim side tells anyone willing to listen, meanwhile, seemingly having waited for years to vent its outrage at someone like Sarrazin. Its members are just as convinced of an Islamophobic media as his supporters are of one intent on muffling them, accusing the press of publishing lies about Islam and claiming that manufactured commotion over Sarrazin proves either that Germany’s integration problem is a myth or that he represents a nonsolution.

Sarrazin certainly has struck a nerve—two, in fact. First, he and those on his side have hit upon European Muslims’ eagerness

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to take offense, playing the victim and in need of a hate figure onto whom to project their frustrations. Nowadays, this much is only traditional—the political scientist Bassam Tibi once served as such a figure, followed by the sociologist Necla Kelek. In Sarrazin Muslims now finally have a German-born German as proof of the will to drive them out.

Equally though, his statements have hit on many Germans' own insecurity regarding their identity and future. Those over sixty embrace his ideas with particular warmth, because they have rarely joined such debates in the past since they were concerned with planning their retirement. More often than not, today's seniors are physically and mentally fit, well informed after hours spent online, and keen to enter the sociopolitical fray in a youth- and success-oriented culture that offers them little to do except go on a holiday or engage in a few hours of volunteering here or there, their lives stagnating while the world around them races on. Once, they moved and shook their society, yet now at every turn they find themselves confronted with foreign faces and tongues, and multiculturalism all of a sudden is the norm. A paranoid fear takes hold that everything they once held dear is vanishing; they no longer appear to be shaping their history or identity. This is not so much a fear of change as a panicked reach for self-preservation.

Germans—at least, these Germans—are pursuing a politics of frustration. At demonstrations opposing the proposed Stuttgart 21 railway for ecological reasons, the average age of protesters was noticeably advanced. Many of them would not live long enough to see the realization of the long-term project. With reports of terror attacks or civil wars in the Islamic world being a fixture in today's news, the response from the same aging rabble-rousers is predict-

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able. “Now,” they complain, “they want to build all these great mosques as well!”

It is uncharitable, perhaps—but Sarrazin’s book caters masterfully to just such fears and frustrations. His success among native-born Germans invites comparisons with that of Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan—a religious nationalist—among Germany’s Turkish populace. When Erdoğan took office in 2003, academic experts on Islam hailed him as a moderate—a characterization I could never quite accept, tending instead to view Islamism and moderation as mutually exclusive. While it was hoped that political and financial realities might cajole Erdoğan into pragmatism, Islamists only ever style themselves as peaceful or moderate before taking power, striving for domination, and banishing heretics, because they believe in a homogenous and hermetically sealed society. Whenever leaders like Erdoğan seize the reins of power, their masks fall away.

The constant goal of Turkey’s premier has been not just to steer his country’s political system and economy (as might actually be his job), but also to reeducate its whole society, building new cities and policing its citizens’ social and moral conduct, controlling who lives where—as well as who loves whom—to this day, brutalizing demonstrators, dubbing them criminals and unbelievers, and arresting journalists for criticizing his plans or leadership style. No country in the world has more journalists in its jails than Turkey, with seventy-six imprisoned in 2012—which is more than Russia, Iran, or China.¹ Thousands of activists and intellectuals have likewise been jailed, with some accused of belonging to terrorist groups simply for writing articles critical of Erdoğan or for joining protests against him.

And Erdoğan has done his best to influence Turks outside

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his own borders. The jubilation with which he was welcomed in Cologne's Lanxess Arena in February 2008 was much like the thunderous applause Sarrazin received at Munich's House of Literature in September 2010. Both men's supporters herald them as saviors and sources of identity.

Eighteen-to-thirty-year-olds are fondest of Erdoğan, as is shown in their gratitude for his instructive teachings during his 2008 visit. Most of the young people in question were born inside Germany, attended the country's schools, and considered it their home, yet simultaneously they felt like foreigners in their homeland and were disconcerted by Islam's image problems and German attitudes to ethnic Turks. In some ways, Erdoğan offers them comfort and reassurance, as if promising to welcome them open-armed if their society keeps rejecting them.

Many German-born Turks who celebrated his visit, while not Islamists themselves to start with, viewed Erdoğan and his party, the AKP, as signs of hope that Islam and democracy might perhaps be compatible. In their euphoria, they overlooked the totalitarian undertones of his politics and his government. Today, Turkey is no longer the marriage of Islam and democracy it once was; it is home to a lesser strain of Islamic fascism and has great potential for further radicalization. Erdoğan's role in backing Islamists in Syria, meanwhile, has yet to be widely publicized. Responses among young Muslims in Germany to recent corruption allegations against Erdoğan's government often make distinguishing moderates from hardcore Islamists rather easy: the former cite Western conspiracies, and the latter—namely jihadists and Salafists—dub Erdoğan's trials a divine comeuppance for failing to implement sharia, which includes a blanket ban on alcohol and prostitution.

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Both Sarrazin and Erdoğan sell their supporters a poor substitute for real life in their respective nations, though neither man's views cast any light on the real problem facing Germany, where at least three distinct social groups avoid one another like the plague. Living separately is all very well when people can live and let live, but the divisions fracturing the country's society are ideological, upheld by mutual resentment.

Set in its ancient, archaic, and deeply religious ways, a migrant subculture has built a high psychological wall between itself and its children and the society surrounding them, as they possess neither the linguistic nor the social skills required for upward mobility. At the same time, Germany's upper-class minority hopes to spare its children the headache of "problem immigrants," sending them to schools where precious few are to be found and sometimes appearing to respond to Islamization elsewhere in society with a newly devout Christianity—they are unready for multiculturalism's challenges and cling to a romanticized image of Germany that conforms to reality in the late nineteenth century.

Christian schools are admitting ever-increasing numbers of pupils, as are fee-paying schools that most immigrant parents could never afford—both of which are forms of social cleansing and elitist segregation. Simultaneously, rising numbers of private Turkish schools specializing in Islam are serving Germany's Turkish middle class. Children who grow up in "sanitized" educational environments return—on leaving school, at the latest—to an outside world whose challenges they remain unequipped for, lacking as they do the social and intercultural skills that form the basis of a functional society and economy in a globalized age.

If nothing else, my hope is that German society's third and

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largest constituency will come to consist of those from both migrant and nonmigrant backgrounds who know how to resolve conflicts rather than just stomach them, and that the social views of Sarrazin and Erdoğan alike have no place in their common future. Group number three seems currently to lack lobbying power, failing to attract media attention since provocateurs are the ones who make the news. But my hope is also that this group continues to grow, helping to detoxify Germany's national mood without a large-scale push for integration or official dialogue. Extreme measures are the last thing we need; the real answer lies in effective policies on education and nationwide social and economic stability, nurturing young people on whose talents the future depends.

There was a time I hoped Sarrazin's provocative claims would end this third community's lethargy, lending the dispute renewed direction. In truth, group number three has only ceded ground to his followers and Erdoğan's, with debates leading nowhere except toward increased polarization, heightened isolation on either side, and pressure on society's multicultural center to show its colors one way or the other. Both halves of this pincer movement are meeting today's political, economic, and social challenges with insecurity and fear, projecting the causes of each onto one another rather than removing the blinders from their own eyes.

Turning to ancient institutions in response to globalization's upheavals shows a distinct lack of creativity: neither solace nor a secure feeling of belonging will come of archaic religious or national identities built on excluding others. The future belongs to liberal multiculturalism, and those who participate in social cleansing and building high walls around their own cultures and religions forfeited their place in it long ago.

CHAPTER 12

MAPPING THE TERRAIN OF TERROR— ISLAMISM, ISLAM, AND THE ISLAMIC STATE

Few groups embody Islamic fascism so well as the Islamic State, which dreams of a utopian theocracy, thirsting insatiably for murder in the meantime, violently oppressing minorities and displaying deep hatred for the rest of humanity. The modern world is witnessing a new global jihad featuring Islam's most extreme tendencies unleashed, and whether those who join the struggle are practicing the true Islam or warping it for their own ends, the threat remains. Together with political unease in today's Arab states, mounting extremism threatens to turn Islam into a ticking bomb—and while most Muslims might not want to see it go off, others consider acts of violence to fulfill a divine promise.

ISLAMIST VIOLENCE ON THE MARCH

When the Islamic State marched on Iraq in the summer of 2014, its supporters published a map of an imaginary world caliphate, claiming everywhere Muslims had ever lived would belong to them within five years. The list included half of Asia, specifically;

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three quarters of Africa; parts of eastern Europe; and, naturally, Andalusia. Explaining how this would be achieved, one of its militants declared that the victory of Islam would “not be won without mangled bodies and smashed in skulls.” In an audio recording, the organization’s self-proclaimed caliph Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi later demanded that jihad erupt all around the world.

Unrestrained brutality, the Islamic State’s members tell themselves, will change the course of history, bringing the rule of God to bear on Earth. One could argue a mere thirty thousand soldiers might struggle to conquer the Earth, but the threat posed by political Islam takes root in an idea as much as in its armies of murderers. The worldwide caliphate is an image carved on the collective Islamic mind, a reminder of the Muslim faith’s military and economic might between the seventh and eleventh centuries. Most modern Muslims might reject the Islamic State and its brutal methods, but polls show a majority support the establishment of a caliphate and implementation of sharia law.¹

Synonymous with the ideal of utopian theocracy, the Islamic State has found itself in the right place at the right time. Twenty-first-century Syria and Iraq are failed states where nationalism and pan-Arabism have served their time and democracy failed to catch on. They are fertile ground for attempts to revive the Prophet’s original state. Muhammad is said to have drawn a map not unlike the Islamic State’s, writing to Byzantium’s emperor, the Sassanian shah in Persia, Egypt’s Roman governor, and Abyssinia’s Christian king, telling each, “Convert to Islam, and you’ll be safe.” Soon after his death, many of the same territories were under Islamic rule.

Today, dreams of omnipotence soothe the impotence many

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Muslims feel—one of which drives thousands of young men to leave Europe for Syria and Iraq. The Arab Spring's promise of freedom having gone nowhere, a ferocious religious aggression is on the rise. Muslims who were nobodies in their own countries—whether Egypt, Tunisia, Chechnya, or European states like Germany—end up fighting for the Islamic State. Unlike al-Qaeda, which is set on training suicide bombers, the Islamic State recruits soldiers, offering them the chance to go on the offensive and conquer the world, quitting a hostile twenty-first century to try their luck in the seventh. With no qualifications or prospects at home, these soldiers can become governors of small towns in Iraq and rule them like sultans, affording pardons or ordering executions, and otherwise living as overlords of life and death. The offer of such power has proven so seductive that the Islamic State has conquered whole stretches of Iraq and Syria in mere months, just as the seventh century's Muslims did.

In place of knowledge, education, or economic planning, what brought Muhammad's followers military success was their devotion to Allah and to doing his will. The Qur'an states, "You are the best people begotten to mankind. Demand justice and forbid what is reprehensible!"—a surah supporters of sharia in Europe cite as often as do the moral guardians of Saudi Arabia, Iran, northern Nigeria, and the Indonesian province of Banda Aceh. These individuals view themselves as enforcers of divine law, but rank-and-file Muslims accept religious law's supremacy as often as Islamists do; this, too, allowed the Islamic State to capture cities of millions with only a few thousand fighters of its own.

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A BOOK AND A SWORD

The march of the Islamic State's militias showcases a new side of jihad. In Mosul, during his only public appearance, al-Baghdadi declared, "I will not promise you the security and prosperity other rulers promise their subjects. No, I promise you only what Allah promised us in the Qur'an: that believers will be his lieutenants on Earth."² Al-Baghdadi called Muslims to arms against unbelievers, pronouncing, "An Islamic state can only exist when Allah's law is carried out. For that, we need power and strength, a book that shows the way, and a sword to help our religion triumph."

In its contemporary form, that sword is known as the Islamic State, but the book is called the Qur'an just as it always was. The briefest glance at an actual world map shows the Islamic State is only one of countless Islamist organizations with many of the same ideas; its notion of a caliphate resonates across the Arab world, with Islamists in Libya and Algeria swearing loyalty to al-Baghdadi's leadership and with Sinai-based terrorist group Ansar Bait al-Maqdis becoming the Egyptian wing of the Islamic State in November 2014. The organization likewise receives tremendous support from within Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Lebanon, and Jordan, and most of its fighters even hail from Tunisia, birthplace of the Arab Spring.

Elsewhere in the world, Western globalization has met with three responses—creative in Asia, reactionary in Arabia, and passive in Africa. Islamic countries like Malaysia and Indonesia were among the first to reap the rewards of the former, where secularization and modernization have been possible due to ethnic and religious diversity, yet these countries' influence on Islam's

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Arabian heartland has remained weak, some even importing sharia and jihadism from turbulent Middle Eastern nations.

In parts of Malaysia, Muslim coexistence with non-Muslims grows more imperiled by the day as a result of religious insistence on Islamic law; in Indonesia, meanwhile, sharia laws were first introduced in Banda Aceh in 1999, initially applying only to public dress codes and family law, but they have grown to encompass criminal law since 2009. Homosexuality and violation of gender segregation are punished with floggings; adultery is punished with death by stoning; and sharia police patrol the Aceh's cities, arresting sinners. The terrorist group Jemaah Islamiyyah, which is responsible for 2002's bombings in Bali, is undergoing a renaissance. Its leader, Abu Bakar, formally recognized al-Baghdadi as caliph and head of the Islamic State from inside his cell in July 2014, declaring full support for him. Outlaws from the terrorist group Abu Sayyaf in the Philippines and Afghan warlords profiteering from the country's drug trade likewise exploit Islam, proving jihad need not be religious.

Islamist groups' mercilessness speaks to the rage of the down-trodden, rarely more eloquently than in Africa, the continent yet to profit from globalization. While both China and the West avail themselves of Africa's resources, both have sealed off their markets from exports of the continent. No one seems to protest against that in Africa. Only radical Islam appears to accommodate African anger. In Africa, too, dreams of a caliphate provide an escape route from a hopeless reality. The starkest example is Boko Haram, a terrorist group that once only targeted police stations and military structures but intensified its assaults in 2009 when founder Ustaz Mohammed Yusuf was killed by security forces. One of its suicide

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bombers destroyed the United Nation's Nigerian headquarters in Abuja in 2011. The group's victims are estimated to number ten thousand or more, yet terror experts have downplayed the threat; the West only acknowledged the danger when Boko Haram kidnapped over 250 mostly Christian schoolgirls.

"THIS IS THE WILL OF GOD"

Taking after the Islamic State, Boko Haram has now proclaimed its own caliphate in Nigeria's northeastern Borno State. Northern Nigeria has always been home to Islamists, but Boko Haram represents a new breed, with its cells operating throughout the country and membership reportedly numbering 280,000.³ Globally, the group has been linked to Somalia's al-Shabaab militias, Ansar Dine in Mali, and Islamist groups in Kenya and Eritrea, yet the Islamic State now seems to interest Nigeria's Islamists more than does al-Qaeda.

Around the world, terrorism in Allah's name continues to cross national borders as militant Islamism takes advantage of ethnic and cultural differences. Its ideas are the same wherever it rears its head, and its methods are brutal. Where once jihadist groups had their own agendas, today's groups are moving in on one another's turf and competing for supporters. The Islamic State remains the new paradigm; its caliphate's early military and media victories back rival groups like al-Qaeda into a tight spot, with Islamists in Pakistan and Algeria breaking off from al-Qaeda to pledge themselves to the Islamic State. Without a new September 11 type of offensive, al-Qaeda itself—which recently announced the formation of an Indian wing—risks fading into obscurity.

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Ought we to be afraid of Islam? In the mutual enmity of competing Islamists who pray to the same god, there lies the possibility that these groups will fail to combine resources and inflict further harm. At the same time, these groups may prove harder and harder to combat in their disunity. Even if the Islamic State ends up as a footnote in Middle Eastern history—a fate to which al-Qaeda is already succumbing—its ideas and mind-set that proclaim a life of subjugation as utopian will live on. “This is the will of God,” it states. “There is no other choice.”

“Surrender” is the literal translation of the Arabic word *Islam*, and to this day too many Muslims believe God spies on their deeds and thoughts, punishing each and every wrong move. Few keep all their religion’s laws, of course, but many view themselves as sinners, fearing divine punishment and longing desperately to cleanse themselves of sin—a desire that drives them to a subservient state of mind. One of modernity’s greatest achievements has been people’s liberation from the notion of a punitive god. The Enlightenment allowed Christians to break free from subservience—a prerequisite for freedom and critical thought Muslim conservatives reject, deeming obedience to God as the very meaning of life. Childlike obedience follows on this attitude’s coattails, hamstringing all forms of social progress.

The world has cause to fear Islamists as much as it feared twentieth-century fascists. While fascism was defeated in its own military conquests, its ideology had to be crushed both morally and militarily before its resurgence was considered a futile prospect. After the Second World War, Europe required the Marshall Plan, and many of today’s Islamic states are in need of something similar. Yet they must also free themselves from a theology of violence.

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Had Germans insisted that Hitler and his peers were evil but their racial beliefs sound, fascism would never have been beaten; likewise, Muslims today need to emancipate themselves from Islam's authoritarian mode of thought.

Of course not all of Islamism's causes are religious, but anyone who hopes to extinguish the violent theology assaulting the world today must first face facts: it *is* a product of Islam.

A TAX ON CHRISTIANITY

On the Iraqi television station Ashtar TV, a young Christian woman is being interviewed after having fled Mosul for the Kurdish town of Erbil. Despite having lost everything, she counts herself lucky to be alive, describing how Islamic State fighters raided her home, giving her family four options: emigrate, pay a poll tax, convert, or die. Without picking up belongings or even her passport, she fled as her former home became Islamic State property. During the interview, the woman rebukes the jihadists responsible: "Does the Qur'an not say to enter no house uninvited?" Hounding Christians, she states, goes against Prophet Muhammad's bidding. Soon after, another Christian refugee blurts to the camera, "This is *not* true Islam!"⁴

No?

Then what does true Islam look like?

Between its forces in Iraq and Syria, the Islamic State commands between twenty and thirty-one thousand soldiers⁵, whereas over a million Muslims live in Mosul alone, and many of them possess weapons. So why could no "true" Muslims be found in their Christian neighbors' hour of need? Could it conceivably be

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that mention is made of “true Islam” only when Islam’s name needs to be cleared?

Alas, the Islamic State’s treatment of Christians has everything to do with Islam, the Qur’an, the Prophet’s *hadiths*, and the history of Islamic conquest lending it a strong case for its actions. In Surah 59, readers are told Muhammad drove Jews, “the ones who disbelieved,” from their dwellings; and prior to his death, the Prophet promised to “rid Arabia of Jews and Christians,”⁶ allowing no one except Muslims to live in the region. Even the tax the Islamic State extorts from Christians has a basis within the Qur’an as Surah 9 states: “Fight those who do not believe in Allah or in the Last Day . . . until they give the *jizyah* [“tax”] willingly while they are humbled.”

Shortly after Muhammad’s death, his successors conquered modern Iraq, Syria, and Egypt, most of whose citizens were Christians. Rather than driving millions of “unbelievers” out, Muslim authorities made the *jizyah* tax their central source of revenue, levied not just on Jews and Christians but also on Zoroastrians, to whom they taught the ways of monotheism. So as to evade both the *jizyah* and other forms of repression, many Iraqi Christians tried to convert to Islam in the late seventh century, only to have the region’s administrator, al-Hajjaj, force them to retain their *dhimmi* (*jizyah*-paying non-Muslim) status.

Among the earliest sources of laws governing *dhimmi* was a document attributed to Islam’s second caliph, Umar ibn al-Khattab,⁷ who is said to have signed a pact with Christians in Jerusalem on conquering the city in 638, allowing them to retain their churches and beliefs while living under Muslim protection. A drastic *quid pro quo* was demanded of the Christians, who were made to pay

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the *jizyah* and banned from building new churches or restoring old ones, displaying crosses, riding on horseback, bearing arms, or building houses higher than Muslim ones, as well as being required to identify themselves through their clothing and hairstyles (heads shaved toward the front and hair worn unparted).

Nor is the Islamic State implementing a new idea when it marks Christian houses today with the letter *N* for *Nasrani* (Arabic for “Christians”). Between the ninth and eleventh centuries, sharia’s role in public life having become minor, *dhimmi* laws were relaxed; a relatively tolerant coexistence managed to emerge, but the Crusades of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries saw anti-Christian laws tightened in modern Egypt and Syria. Middle Eastern Christians were punished for the crimes of Christian invaders from the West. Only in the nineteenth century did the Ottoman Empire put an end to its own apartheid judiciary, while in Saudi Arabia, *dhimmi* laws never had to be applied because Muhammad’s successors had fulfilled his ambition of cleansing the region of Christians and Jews. Today in Syrian and Iraqi towns like Mosul, the Islamic State demands nothing more or less from Christians than Islam’s earliest rulers did.

Interviewed on the Arabic-language channel RT (originally Russia Today), Nikodemos Dawuud Matta, Syrian Orthodox Bishop of Mosul, lamented the Islamic State’s brutality toward Christians, making reference to genocide and ethnic cleansing.⁸ While numerous Muslim moderates appeared, condemning its atrocities and calling the protection of *dhimmi* an Islamic duty, such an approach is exactly where the problem takes root: when the program’s Arabic-speaking host uttered the word *dhimmi*, the bishop finally lost his temper, retorting, “We reject that word—

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because *we are not slaves!*” That the poor man had to tell ostensibly liberal Muslims not to call Christians like him “*dhimmi*” or “unbelievers” ought to be proof enough that the Islamic State is not Islam’s only problem.

ISLAMISM VERSUS ISLAM—A USEFUL DISTINCTION?

At one point, I insisted on drawing a clear distinction between Islamism and Islam, thinking it would shield ordinary Muslims from generalized suspicion. Over time, though, it became clear to me that doing so only played into Islamists’ hands, much as the concepts of Islamophobia and moderate Islamism do. Calling Islam a religion of peace while criticizing Islamists as if in a vacuum suggests that political Islam’s ideas are sound and only require the proper implementation, which allows it to worm its way into debates again by the back door. By contrast, distinguishing Muslims from Islam seems to me more important.

Islam certainly has a multitude of traditions, practiced in strikingly different ways by their followers, from Sufists in Senegal to peasants in Malaysia, Shiites in Bahrain and Iran to the Sunnites of Bangladesh and Pakistan. While these distinctions may be of interest to anthropologists, ethnologists, and theologians, their significance pales in matters of politics, where differences between the world’s Muslim communities are less important than what they share—namely, Islamism, sharia, and the dream of a caliphate. Whether under Iran’s Shiite regime or in Sunnite Banda Aceh in Indonesia—whether in Mali or the Gaza Strip, Karachi or Casablanca—political Islam sweeps ethnic and cultural differences aside. Those who answer its call hold the same view of the

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human society and the world, to homogenize both and to enforce divine law by means as violent as necessary.

The Islamic faith's spiritual and communal aspects are thoroughly benign, and they comfort and reassure hundreds of millions of Muslims; but Islamism remains its most effective selling point, legitimizing the religion's history and seeming to fulfill a divine promise. Islam has always been a slave to its own birth defects, achieving political success early in its lifetime and governing a nation-state during its prophet's; no other religion can claim to have come into being the same way. With Muhammad (unlike Jesus) being a head of state, judge, general, lawmaker, chief of police, and minister of finance as well as a preacher, Islam was political from its inception, as statecraft, economics, violence, and warfare merged with its religious elements and were sacralized accordingly. This, not the content of individual verses from scripture, is its inherent problem. What the Qur'an's specific statements are matters much less than how today's Muslim majority adhere to it—namely, as the unadulterated and direct word of God, inerrant for all eternity; what Muhammad may or may not have done 1,400 years ago matters much less than does how many Muslims view him as a twenty-first-century role model.

According to his biography, Muhammad waged between seventy and ninety wars during the last eight years of his life—approximately one per month.⁹ He left Arabia Christian- and Jew-free, enforcing Islam by the sword and once having between four and nine hundred unarmed Jews beheaded on a single day—by modern standards, a crime against humanity. Distinguishing Islamism from Islam requires either that Muhammad be disowned outright or that he be relinquished as a modern role model; the

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eternal inviolability of the Qur'an and the Prophet is one more of Islam's central problems, and those who insist on it are Islamists however much they distance themselves from the Islamic State.

So what is Islamism? Where does it begin and end? Are the Islamic State, Boko Haram, and al-Qaeda Islamists, but not Hamas, the Muslim Brotherhood, or Erdoğan's AKP? Do any of these groups strive for anything wholly unlike what Muhammad and the world's first Muslims strove for, namely, partitioning the world into believers and unbelievers and establishing jihad as a long-term project for all Muslims? Muhammad and his followers conquered entire territories, offering Christians and Jews a choice between conversion, the *jizyah*, and death just as the Islamic State does and enslaving defeated armies' women and children. Muslims who believe the same today are known as Islamists, but at the time they were simply followers of Islam.

And who counts as an Islamist? Is it a militia member brandishing a black flag and ordering beheadings, or is it anyone who prizes Islamic law above that of their own society? It seems to me that an Islamist might just as easily be a father who withdraws his daughter from swimming lessons or a mother who warns her not to befriend pork-eating, alcohol-drinking, fornicating non-Muslims. As well as al-Qaeda and the Boko Haram, Muslim groups who promote awareness of Islam, practice Islamic banking, and protest against the Gaza conflict while doing nothing to oppose the Islamic State seem Islamist to me—as does anyone who insists that sharia and democracy can be reconciled, because, whether intentionally or not, they risk making democracy a Trojan horse for political Islam.

Only when Islam overcomes its birth defects will decoupling

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it from Islamism be viable. For that to happen, Muslims must renounce its legal and political aspects and its fascist leanings; as long as it still teaches that God is the sole lawgiver, his commands unchanging and nonnegotiable, it will be inextricable from Islamism. (In medieval Europe, Judaism and Christianity were no keener on democracy, having to be politically weakened before they could live underneath its roof. Depoliticizing Islam while still being Muslim is perfectly possible.) Only when Muslims relinquish the Islamic god—one who monitors humanity from on high, punishing minor crimes with hellfire while his own perfection goes unquestioned—will Islam be entirely distinct from Islamism. Only when the core teaching of Islam—that humans were created to serve God and enforce his laws on Earth—has been downplayed will such a distinction be viable.

Of course, a Muslim in Paris, Copenhagen, or Berlin who forces his daughter to wear a *hijab* is a world away from one who beheads unbelievers in Syria, but both are driven by the urge to submit to God's will, telling themselves they have no choice. This much is the Muslim faith's core problem: in Arabic, surrendering to God's will has never been called "Islamism," because the word for it is just "Islam."

Alcoholism is to alcohol as Islamism is to Islam: a light amount can prove restorative and comforting, while too much can spur a dangerous and aggressive habit. Whereas Islam's spiritual aspects often serve to comfort and console, the more influence it comes to wield over daily life, the nearer Islamism looms, for Islam itself polices Muslims' lives from the moment they wake till they close their eyes at night. Any Islam seeking a clean break from Islamism must begin by relinquishing jihad, sharia, gender segregation, and

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strict regulation of daily life. The question is, how much of the “true” Islam will remain without these?

The people to distinguish from Islam are Muslims, not Islamists. Not every Muslim is a walking Qur’an, nor do all Muslims observe all their faith’s rituals and moral proscriptions. Only a minority attend a mosque at all, so to ascribe each one the same traits or smear them with others’ misdeeds would be fatally misguided. More to the point, those hoping to see their faith become a private matter need all the support they can get—in particular, Muslims trying to break free from ancient religious structures of social control need much more of it. Without Muslim progressives’ help, depoliticizing Islam may well prove a lost cause, and Europe’s future hangs in the balance.

CHAPTER 13

CHARLIE HEBDO AND ISLAM'S OUTRAGE INDUSTRY

In January 2015, two brothers stormed the offices of French satirist magazine *Charlie Hebdo*, opening fire on its staff. Both felt that by publishing caricatures of Muhammad the magazine had declared war on Islam and its prophet. Engrossed sufficiently deeply in this conviction, the attackers shot twelve unarmed people in cold blood, believing that by doing so they would bring victory for Islam. This war and their prophet's defiled honor alike were figments of their imagination, but the people they killed were flesh and blood.

While it would never do to treat the *Charlie Hebdo* attackers as representatives of the world's 1.5 billion Muslims, the reactionary outrage that motivated them is symptomatic of a widespread mindset in the ummah. The ferocity of their attack reflected the asymmetry of Western-Islamic relations. Over the course of centuries, countless factors have cemented this paranoia, not least of which were colonialism, the Crusades, and Israel. Political unrest and discontent in many Islamic states also sparked conspiracy theories and resentment, but Muslim belief in a global plot against Islam is as old as Islam itself. In places, the Qur'an stresses that God created the world's tribes and peoples so they might come to know one another—but overall, Islamic scripture overwhelmingly preaches mistrust of non-Muslims.

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Muhammad warned his followers endlessly of deceit at unbelievers' hands, forbidding them from fraternizing with Christians or Jews. Elsewhere in the Qur'an, God informs his prophet, "Never will the Jews or the Christians approve of you until you follow their religion."¹ On his deathbed, Muhammad even claimed to have been poisoned by a female Jew, despite his own expulsion of all of Medina's Jews a good many years prior. Shortly before his death, the Prophet is said to have foreseen the peoples of the world swarming predator-like upon his followers, seeing them to have grown numerous and yet "weak at heart," enfeebled due to preferring life to death.² Islamists often cite this prophecy, viewing Muslims' standing around in today's world as its fulfillment, determined to regain their old strength in devotion to death.

When taken in tandem, megalomania and isolation spur paranoia. Right up until his death, Hitler remained convinced not just that there were Jewish and Allied plots against Germany but also that unseen forces were conspiring against him personally.³ Documents first published in 2005 attest that the führer had both his toilet and the water in which eggs were boiled tested for poison. Hitler projected his insecurities onto both real and imaginary foes, ordering his own body burned beyond recognition on his death so as to stop Joseph Stalin from displaying it in a glass case. Just as his career had begun with grievances at German humiliation under the Treaty of Versailles, it ended with fears of posthumous indignity at his communist archrivals' hands.

For philosopher Umberto Eco, mass feelings of "abjection and degradation" are features of emerging fascism, whose supporters feel constantly and intentionally targeted by their enemies., They take refuge in the rhetoric of victimhood, exaggerating their

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enemies' strength while understating their own since they are convinced of their ability (indeed obligation) to crush their adversaries but forever failing to because they are sabotaged by their own paranoia and lust for power. Hassan al-Banna, founder of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, hoped to conquer the known world but ended his life bleeding in the street, little more than another gunned-down Islamist. During his country's Six-Day War with Israel in 1967, virtually all Arab radio stations claimed Egyptian forces would blast the Jewish state off the surface of the Earth—only to find themselves soundly beaten within a week. Hezbollah and Hamas have likewise voiced their intent to obliterate Israel since time immemorial; Osama bin Laden passionately enumerated Western insults to Islam, convinced that a terrorist attack would finally be enough to defeat the West, and now the Islamic State believes staunchly in its own worldwide conquest, thereby delivering Islam's victory once and for all.

Blood, honor, and (self-) destruction—these are what Islamists and fascists share.

A HISTORY OF PRIDE AND SHAME

The state of cultural thought observed in the Islamic world for several generations now brings to mind Plato's allegory of the cave.⁴ There is an entire people chained up in the dark from birth, able to see only the wall immediately in front of them. In Plato's thought experiment, a fire burns brightly just behind them, projecting shadows onto the wall. While the people can see the shadows, they have no idea of what casts them, and should anyone speak behind their backs, their words will echo off the wall, the

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captives believing themselves to be hearing the shadows talk. The core question of the allegory is what the people in the cave would do if ever they got free and turned to look behind them, away from the wall. First, Plato thinks, they might be dazzled by the firelight, before they deem the people they heard earlier an illusion and turn back to the comforting certainty of the shadows on the wall.

For centuries, the Islamic world kept itself isolated from the rest of humankind, gazing at its own shadow, convinced that no wider world existed beyond its borders—only to have the more advanced “other” show up, violently throwing the cave open. When Napoleon Bonaparte’s fleet landed in Alexandria in 1798, an unequal confrontation ensued between a technologically superior European power and an Arab culture still locked in a standstill. Anti-Western leaders deemed modernization tantamount to an act of surrender—an act that would have relinquished their authentic Islamic identity. The job of those despotic monarchs was made as easy for them, as that of orthodox religious zealots had always been; they needed only to turn back their societies’ clocks and start afresh, invoking the memory of the Prophet’s own time. During the Crusades and under colonialism, renaissances in Islamic religious thought and politics are clearly discernible: societies draw on cultural memory to mobilize their people in periods of unrest, and having crushed all other sources of shared identity, Islam proved the only place left to turn whenever its people were on the defensive, hiding the shame of naked abjection. Shame invites fear, fear invites faith, and finding themselves needed once again, conservatives took advantage and pursued their religious mission.

Staring at one’s own shadow for centuries gives rise to fantasies of oppression. Every criticism from outside is termed a dec-

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laration of war; every dissenting sentiment is deemed heresy or treason. The more closed-off a society becomes, the more fiercely it swears by the outside world's hostility, enforcing its own moral code ever more strictly and pressuring its members to show unflinching loyalty, which begins with psychological and intellectual self-deceit. Faustian thoughts are quashed if they manage to form at all, while intruders and those who try to flee are feared and loathed alike. The greater the influence of the outside world becomes, the more harshly a closed-off society punishes those who step out of line, surviving as it does on solidarity, silence, and surveillance while risking death by cultural incest. Its leaders cover up its worst atrocities, while those most subjugated suppress their knowledge of this. All who dare act against this logic risk banishment at best, death by burning at worst. Islamic reformists have paid dearly time and again—frequently with their lives—for attempting to foster change. At other times, people have simply turned their backs, returning to their cave to chain themselves up voluntarily and gaze straight at the wall, eyes front.

Too many Muslims view modernity as a foreign body, imported from across the Mediterranean and enforced ever since by colonists or home-grown despots, never preached or appealingly packaged by any torchbearer of Muslim culture. Nowhere in the Islamic world was modernity incorporated into tradition with the same creativity as in, to name one example, Japan. There it helped heal the still-fresh wounds of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and prompted cooperation with America during the country's reconstruction. On the contrary, the Islamic world continued licking its postcolonial wounds while an outrage industry prospered as a result and the nation-building concept of *asala*—meaning “authenticity,” “sovereignty,” or “originality”—took hold in the modern age, offering

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Muslims a golden calf to worship whenever they sought a new identity, either in the form of brutal theocracy or that of supposedly secular dictators who rule with an iron fist and style their own cults of personality in that of ancient tribal leaders. Regimes of both kinds would crave enemies, both at home and abroad.

In 1992, Egyptian Farag Foda was killed by extremists outside his house when scholars at al-Azhar University issued a fatwah against him for blasphemy.⁵ Foda had done nothing to question God's existence or call the Prophet a child molester; his only crime had been pleading publicly for the separation of mosque and state, and a humorous aside about headscarves cost him his life. Seven years earlier, Sudanese theologian Mahmoud Mohammed Taha had been put to death in Khartoum for presenting sharia as a historical construct no longer mandatory.⁶ He was one of only a few Arab intellectuals to call for reconciliation with Israel during the nationalist heyday of the 1960s, suggesting rather that Arabs save the energy and resources of an arms race for development at home. For this alone, he was proclaimed a heretic.

Chief among numerous factors, Muslims today have their own self-image to blame for being constantly, aggrievedly outraged, viewing themselves as heirs to a high culture but unable to recognize its loss of global power long ago. To quote Tunisian-born French author Abdelwahab Meddeb, "Islam has failed to cope with losing power."⁷ The resulting resentment only fosters fundamentalism, which Meddeb calls the most inflamed site of an "Islamic sickness." An archaic culture of honor and resistance still stands in the way of fruitful relations with the West, which many a twenty-first-century Muslim views reductively as "the enemy," as thoughts of vengeance prove an inescapable and feverish fantasy.

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At times I find it hard not to believe that Muslims enjoy being outraged at the West, taking constant offense as part of a masochistic game and reassuring themselves of their own continued significance. Many almost appear to *want* the West to be against them, with phenomena like PEGIDA (in English, Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the West) and Thilo Sarrazin in Germany, Geert Wilders in the Netherlands, Marine Le Pen in France, and the English Defence League only offering further cause for offense. It does these Muslims' wounded, narcissistic souls good to believe that the West, a powerful and tireless adversary, finds them meaningful enough to acknowledge or want eradicated, for if the West ignored them totally, they might feel suddenly lost.

"OF COURSE IT OFFENDS ME. I'M A MUSLIM!"

Half a lifetime ago, I was a devout Muslim in the Bavarian city of Augsburg. When a German friend studying theology there in hopes of teaching religious instruction opted to tell me a joke, it greatly angered and unsettled me.

A Bavarian butcher, the joke goes, dies and wakes in heaven, only for Saint Peter to stop him at its gates and search his bags, finding a large veal sausage and (never having visited Bavaria) asking the butcher what it is. "It's food," the butcher tells him. "I can't live without it."

Refusing the man entry until he feels satisfied, Saint Peter asks Jesus to identify the sausage. "Alas, Peter," comes the answer. "I cannot. Go and ask my mother—she went to market more than I did and knows food better than me."

Saint Peter approaches the Virgin Mary, handing her the

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sausage to ask if she knows what it is. Taking it and examining its texture carefully, the blessed mother replies, “I’ve never seen it, but it *feels* like the holy spirit.”

At this I was taken aback, unable to laugh and startled that a believing Christian—one training to propagate the faith, no less—could say such things of its most sacred figures. Muslims are by no means humorless in general—I hail from a culture in which almost everything serves as the butt of a joke—but Islam and its prophet are not to be made fun of. In primary schools, Egyptians still recite Muhammad’s binding statement that those who fail to love him more than their parents or children are unfit to call themselves believers—and since no one gets away with mocking their own parents, the same goes more strictly still for him. During his lifetime, some of Muhammad’s followers proved their love for him by killing all who spoke about him inappropriately, and the Arabic notion of *sukhriyyah* (“satire”) is strongly frowned upon in the Qur’an, not least since non-Muslim Meccans mocked Muhammad, declaring him mentally ill⁸ and terming the Qur’an’s contents “recycled old myths.”⁹ Traditional narratives about the Prophet detail many cases of him beheading those he held to have maligned him, numerous poets being among them.

When my friend recited this joke, I was in no position to question the Prophet’s inviolability, asking myself only what the theology student would say about my faith if he treated his own with sarcasm: if he mocked Jesus and Mary, whatever might he say of Muhammad? At the time, I worried I, too, would succumb to the temptations of freedom and laugh at my religion. As I saw it, I was faced with the choice between accepting satire as a by-product of freedom or purging myself of an emancipated lifestyle’s harmful

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influences. Initially I opted for the latter, barricading myself behind my faith and growing ever more radical, even ending friendships with my fellow students. The more I cut myself off, the more comments about Islam both in the media and by colleagues shocked and sickened me. "Of course it offends me," my personal motto back then went. "I'm a Muslim!"

It was only a few years later, on examining Islam more critically, that I realized just how important satire can be. The Danish Muhammad cartoons of 2005 played a key role in changing my mind about Islam after Muslims took to public streets in droves to express their love for their prophet by firebombing Western embassies, outbreaks of violence in which over 150 Muslims were killed. A few in the media dared to allege that their deaths may have been somewhat worse than cartoons satirizing Muhammad. Sometime later, on traveling to Copenhagen to interview Flemming Rose, the Danish editor who published them, I found him to be rational and thoughtful, someone who was fueled neither by hatred nor by racism but by the values of the Enlightenment. The answer, he told me, would not be mass refusal to satirize Muhammad, but for Muslims to learn to live with satire. When I offered the interview to a major Egyptian newspaper, it was published online, but only for a few minutes. As soon as the piece saw the light of day, a wave of protest from readers forced the liberal paper to take it down.

Suddenly, I found that I understood my fellow student's actions in Augsburg. My friend had laughed at his own faith not because he failed to value it but because he was undogmatic, free of compulsion and able to hold his beliefs at arm's length, making room for satire and self-criticism. This is one of the possibilities of a culture of freedom, as well as a challenge that all too many Muslims fail.

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The history of satire in Europe is the history of emancipation from divine rule—in other words, the history of the Enlightenment. In antiquity, philosophers wrangled with their gods; in the Renaissance, satire was the educated classes' preferred art form; and Erasmus of Rotterdam's *The Praise of Folly*, published in Paris in 1511, offers a humanist critique of the church, mocking believers and their sacraments while the Inquisition still raged on.

The Enlightenment saw satire's rise as a didactic medium, promoting the movement's pedagogic goals. With Voltaire the heir to Erasmus, sarcasm in matters of religion paved France's road to the revolution, which was the basis for our civic freedoms today. Even the Enlightenment's own ideas were made fun of, most notably in Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, an ironic take on the dominant theories of the time and their idealized view of humanity. Monty Python, Mr. Bean, and even Jon Stewart and Bill Maher belong to this tradition just as *Charlie Hebdo* does. Political, religious, and social satire always have been society's means of mucking its own stables.

Humor can loosen up whole cultures, unmasking ancient myths and cult figures and helping its people assume a new perspective. It relativizes absolute truths and even emboldens people to leave their self-imposed infancy. For this reason—because humor erodes people's fear of despots—they tend to react to satire with intolerance. When Ayatollah Khomeini issued a fatwah against Salman Rushdie in 1989, it was by no means just because Rushdie's novel *The Satanic Verses* portrayed the Prophet and his wives satirically; the book also lampooned Khomeini personally. Throughout Islam's history, the words “defamation of the Prophet” have been used by rulers set on silencing dissent.

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Worse than state censorship and Islamist intimidation, however, are self-censorship and the tendency of many to feel personally and collectively wounded if their religion is mocked. As if Islamic countries' own problems were insufficient cause for discontent, many Muslims comb newspapers and satellite channels daily in search of stories about oppressed Muslim minorities in China, Europe, or the Philippines, craving proof of a world conspiracy against Islam. On the days their searches turn up nothing, they continue looking—this time for naked drawings of Muhammad, papal statements on Islam being inhumane, or even for soccer clubs whose anthems state the Prophet lacked knowledge of soccer, anything to maintain their beloved sense of outrage somehow or other. So as to acquit the Prophet of promoting terrorism, some bombard embassies with Molotov cocktails, while others react forcefully to statements like Pope Benedict's, as they are desperate to prove Islam humane by whatever acts of violence may be required. In his lecture at the University of Regensburg, Germany, in June 2006, the pope quoted a remark about Islam made at the end of the fourteenth century by Manuel II Palaiologos, the Byzantine emperor. The passage he quoted was "Show me just what Muhammad brought that was new, and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached."¹⁰

In 2007, British schoolteacher Gillian Gibbons found herself arrested in Sudan for naming her class's teddy bear Muhammad.¹¹ Muslim organizations, meanwhile, feel deeply aggrieved at the anthem of the German soccer team Schalke 04, which states "Muhammad was a prophet who knew nothing of [the sport]."¹² On depicting Muhammad in a teddy-bear costume so as not to show his face, the makers of the animated US comedy series *South Park*

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received death threats, despite having regularly mocked Moses, Jesus, and the Buddha without provoking mass protests or threats.¹³

In February 2010, two Egyptian migrants were killed in startlingly similar circumstances, one beaten to death in Milan during an altercation with a South American, the other shot at random in Saudi Arabia. While the shocking story of the former's death made headlines across Egypt for days, next to no coverage went to the Saudi killing, with what reports were written buried in between other articles as if the editors were afraid to mention Saudi Arabia and murder in one breath. In each case, whom the deceased was seemed far less important than the where and at whose hand they perished; even as Egyptian calls for revenge were being hurled exclusively at Italy, the emigrant killed in Saudi Arabia was barely mourned at all.

The impression that a victim's identity matters less to Muslims than their killer's is sometimes very hard to avoid. Around the world, Muslims hold mass demonstrations against cartoons of their prophet and conflicts in Gaza, yet they decline to protest all the while against the terrorism of al-Qaeda, Boko Haram, or the Islamic State, even though those three groups alone have killed more Muslims by far than has any war with Israel.

Muslims who cling to their prophet's inviolability cement the position of despots who oppress in his name, hamstringing attempts at reform and enabling terrorists like those who attacked *Charlie Hebdo*, craving revenge over a handful of drawings. Islam's well-meaning friends in the West, meanwhile, often attempt to keep the peace at home by bestowing upon Muhammad the same inviolable status—doing Muslims no favors whatsoever, since real respect would involve expecting them to handle mockery and criticism like

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any other religious group. To insist as some do that Muhammad be left alone due to being the “basis of Muslim identity” ignores the fact that centuries of being given a free pass are *why* he still plays such a role.

The day will come when Muslims are more grateful to heretics, satirists, and critics of Islam than to apologists and appeasers, which leads me to view *Charlie Hebdo* as an opportunity—a chance for Muslims finally to relax on the subject of their religion’s texts and figureheads, realizing that only a fragile worldview requires a high wall of threats and intimidation to guard it against outside forces. Cartoons like *Charlie Hebdo*’s may yet serve as exposure therapy for Muslims, prompting them to recognize at least that Islam’s image in the West is far less a problem than are the acts carried out in its name all around the world—and that their main dispute today is not with Islam’s critics and but with Islam itself, its texts, and its general worldview.

Both *Charlie Hebdo*’s caricatures and its massacred staff should give Muslims cause to end the taboo on criticizing Muhammad, for nothing is holier than a person’s life, or more valuable than liberty and human rights. The world will not pay Muslims any more respect while they continue to lash out, setting embassies ablaze. Only when they show more concern for human rights and freedoms today than for the “honor” of a man 1,400 years dead, among them the freedoms of thought and belief, no matter how harsh or unfair, will they achieve the respect they desire. Perhaps rather than its own Martin Luther, what Islam needs to spur reform is its own Erasmus, Voltaire, or *Charlie Hebdo*.

AFTERWORD

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Sociologists and political scientists, among them Ernest Gellner and Francis Fukuyama, tend to view Islamist movements as a source of shared identity for today's Islamic world, much as nationalist ones were for turn-of-the-century Europe. I disagree. Islamism has never been a *source* of identity—it merely acts as a crutch. Islamists need it as a support, and they use it as a weapon. The collective face of Islamists is that of an immobile old man, flailing furiously and swinging his walking stick in all directions. Its followers' noisiness betrays weakness, not strength, a lone tantrum amid the wilderness—yet weakness has only made Islamists more dangerous.

In the “belated” German and Italian nations (see chapter 1), fascism emerged in an us-against-the-world era; the countries in question were caught between their own cultural and national identities and the realities of world events. Today, Muslims across the globe are likewise finding themselves caught between real life and religious tradition's claims. The same maladjustment that plunged the world into catastrophe twice in the early twentieth century gave rise to Islamic fascism, which boasts countless supporters to this day. Yet no matter how versatile or formidable fascism of any strain may be, in the long run, it remains a doomed philosophy.

Neither the climate leading to its rise nor the loyal support of those preserving it can be sustained indefinitely; fascism's survival requires the fuel of constant war, brainwashed followers faithful to

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the last, and never-ending acts of self-sacrifice. The question is not whether fascism can be defeated, for in the end, it always is. The question is how long will its defeat take, and what price will its enemies have to pay? By the time European fascism could be overcome, the continent had been subjected to the Second World War's atrocities, with millions of lives lost. The war laid waste not just to cities but also to whole regions, its victors left with the dubious prize of a decades-long cold war. Is the Islamic world likely to be spared the same fate? Can efforts for modernization and democracy in Muslim countries win out without their people paying the bitter price the Western world once had to, and can their failure to do centuries' worth of homework pass without consequence? Somehow, I find myself doubtful.

The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt may have failed for now in its attempts to construct an Islamic state, but this in no sense spells the end for Islamism elsewhere—or even for the Brotherhood itself, whose supporters remain active in over seventy other countries, equipped with a sustainable network and billions of dollars. Proclaiming the Islamic caliphate's rebirth, the Islamic State has rapidly brought both Syria and Iraq under its own control—yet it remains a state in name only, possessing no fixed borders, seat of government, passports, currency, or overseas embassies. With any luck, establishing theocracies will only become more difficult for Islamists; while an Islamic dictatorship managed to form thirty-five years ago inside Iran and survives to this day, with both the Cold War and the petrodollar allowing its isolationism, the decades since have made preserving such sealed-off states challenging. In particular, new forms of communication and a global world economy have hamstrung despots' attempts to cut their own soci-

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eties off from goings-on elsewhere and at home, a new glasnost having taken place via the web despite (or perhaps due to) the iron grip of those in power. Sooner or later, even states like Turkmenistan and North Korea will be unable to remain walled off.

On the eve of a conference in Berlin in September 2013, I spoke to Francis Fukuyama about his concept of the “end of history.”¹ After the Soviet Union’s collapse, Fukuyama declared the death of ideologies, predicting only liberal democracy would remain a viable option for the nations of the world. When I asked him if this applied to Islamist ideas, as well as whether Islamic societies would democratize as rapidly, Fukuyama replied that owing to many young Muslims’ frustrations and most Islamic states’ poor economic prospects, Islamism’s demise was still a far-off eventuality. Unlike China, he said, where ever-broader swathes of the populace would profit from an economic boom and still-tentative free market, Islamic states were still stagnating. Though he felt sure their people would wise up to world events via the Internet, protesting and perhaps deposing the odd dictators, Fukuyama predicted that this would strike them as futile in the end, both economically and otherwise—a revolution here, a coup there, but business as usual reasserting itself constantly. Few fundamentalists of any stripe could hope for a more fertile breeding ground.

Islamists may no longer be able to build or maintain nation-states, but they can still keep sharia enclaves alive in the wreckage of failed states like Iraq, Syria, Libya, Somalia, Afghanistan, and Mali. In those still halfway operational, Islamists remain able to carve society in two, disabling its institutions while the demography of Islamic states only points to these tensions sharpening. Sixty-five percent of all Muslims are under thirty, with unemployment rising especially rapidly among

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young people, whose energy and anger offer fresh fuel for the fires of radicalization. It does not seem as if their generation's potential will be spent any time soon, with the Islamic world's problems mounting faster than its ability to address them.

In Muslim countries, the state is failing to meet young people's needs or offer them improved prospects. Today, governments are also failing to keep them in check, suppressing them with the aid of state security. This is all to the good for Islamists, who leap to faltering authorities' aid to offer their services. Insatiable as their desire to seize power is, it tends to be a case of shoring up old sinecures, for even where Islamists lend their support to short-term operations here or there, their true focus never shifts from their long-term goal: victory over unbelievers, by means of martyrdom if necessary. Islamists refuse to believe in their societies' reformability through politics or economics. Sovereignty, in their eyes, rests with God rather than with the people. They believe only in the constant battle of good and evil, including the ultimate triumph of the good. Only once the kingdom of God is built on Earth and all humanity adopts Islam will they deem peace or prosperity possible, and until then, their jihad goes on.

At the same time, so many sects and schools of thought clash both politically and theologically that Muslim unity is a fantasy. Muhammad predicted that Muslims would splinter into seventy-two sects, seventy-one of which would follow false doctrines and end up in hell, while a single group, whom he named "the redeemed," would still walk the true path. Today, every Muslim sect claims to be this redeemed branch of the faith, smearing all the rest as unbelievers. Herein lies the basis of Sunnite hatred toward Shiites, Ahmadis Sufists, and Alevists—and among Sun-

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nites themselves, numerous strands have long shown mutual animosity, among them Salafists and the Muslim Brotherhood as well Hanbalists, Malikites, Shafi'ites, Hanafists, and Ash'arites. Even in Syria, jihadists opposing Assad continue to attack *each other*. In view of these endless schisms, European fears of an Islamic assault seem deeply paranoid—look carefully, and Muslims are far busier squabbling among themselves than arming for a theocratic campaign against the West. They fail to agree even provisionally on which Islam is the true one. That said, this internal conflict has yet to stop them from making ready for the end times.

Over a decade after 9/11, al-Qaeda no longer exists as a centrally run organization, having for several years now been weakened severely by the “war on terror.” The Islamic State’s militias may soon face a similar fate, but wherever flagship groups like it fade away, the role of individual insurgents only grows more pronounced.

Both al-Qaeda and the Islamic State now operate through decentralized initiatives, but their basic focus remains the same: from a hermetically sealed, black-and-white worldview to a generous helping of anger, Islamist ideology whips up worldly discontent into religious fury by dehumanizing its victims. The 2014 Boston Marathon bombers, the kidnappers who made headlines in Sydney² late that year, and the assassins who killed the *Charlie Hebdo* editors are merely the overture to the next act in political Islam’s history. No recruitment, global travel, or intensive terrorist training is necessary for their plans to have deadly effect. Anyone keen to build a bomb today can find instructions on the Internet, assemble it himself, and blow a locale of his choice sky high in his hometown. Jihad need not even be that complex, as its soldiers are capable of beheading “unbelievers” with kitchen knives in busy public streets, running them

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over, or else taking them hostage, and groups of young Muslims can now assemble on the Internet, orchestrating plots of their own without orders from al-Qaeda or the Islamic State.

Agents acting alone or in small groups often do so on their own initiative, lacking the precision of top-down jihadists, but they and the threat they pose exist worldwide. They are concerned no longer with how numerous their victims are but with how much media attention and intimidation their attacks can provoke. The more clearly illusory the dream of an Islamic caliphate becomes, and the more pressure the Islamic State comes under in Iraq and Syria, and the more the West will be forced to deal with the actions of their sympathizers in its own backyard. With its gaze focused on the Islamic State and its key figures, the “war on terror” has no strategy against individuals like Sydney’s kidnapper. (On December 15, 2014, an Iranian terrorist named Man Monis stormed into Lindt Chocolate Café in the heart of the Australian capital and took seventeen people as hostages. The drama ended after sixteen hours as Australian Special Forces stormed the café to free the hostages. The terrorist and two hostages were killed.)³ What kind of measures could it even take against them?

Intelligence groups are able to detect painstakingly planned terrorist attacks, in which several people at home and abroad are involved, but lone wolves and copycats prove a challenge for security forces to locate because they typically act spontaneously, without having to inform others of their plans. Jihad no longer has a fixed abode; its ends and means are increasingly opaque.

In Cairo, I met with retired judge and former Muslim Brotherhood member Mohamed Abdel Rasoul, who belonged to the group for over a decade. Having read all its documents and communiqués

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during that time, his prognosis was that the Brotherhood had next to no idea how to govern a nation-state, preparing instead for an endgame with its enemies. When we spoke, the Brotherhood still held power in Egypt, but even then he was able to tell me, “Politically, they’re going to fail. After that they’ll turn back to terrorism, because that’s all they really understand. They’ll mobilize for a struggle to end all struggles, not just in Egypt but around the world. Many will heed that call—not nearly enough for them to win, of course, but enough to subject the world to a good few years of abject terror. It’s never been simpler to persuade a young Muslim man that a suicide attack is the best thing he can do in life.”⁴

Conflicts in Syria, Libya, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Lebanon, and Yemen; mounting fundamentalism in the Gulf states; and renewed Saudi-Iranian religious tensions—all this has laid the ground for a fresh wave of radicalization fiercer than any in the past. These conflicts have spread not just within the Islamic world but also in Europe and North America’s direction, ensuring a further spurt of radicalization there. Abdel Rasoul told me that he thought Islamists in the West had an easier job than ever ahead of them because they are able to organize and recruit freely and don’t have to contend with a police state or with financial obstacles. Those without jobs receive state support, and radical groups pocket lavish donations from within the Gulf states.

Both Fukuyama and Abdel Rasoul doubt the demise of ideology will extend to Islamism, at least in the foreseeable future. The failure of Islamic states is one factor, but is it the only one worth considering?

Nazism was defeated in Germany after twelve years in power. Elsewhere, communism survived seventy-two years. Conversely,

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and in spite of sustaining numerous defeats, Islamism continues to amass new territories and followers and is able to do so since the mission it claims is divine is one many Muslims consider obligatory. Moreover, outside pressures forced fascism in Germany and Japan to its knees. Both nations acknowledged a moral and military defeat and recognized the need for reform. Arduous as the process was, Germany's populace refused to blame the Allies for their own trials, resisting the urge to demonize enemy bombers even as Dresden, Munich, Hamburg, and Berlin lay in smoking ruin, the realization dawning over time that the war the Nazis unleashed had been an unjust one. Even in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, where greater devastation reigned, calls for retribution went unheeded.

Some Germans had been fiercely committed National Socialists from the outset, and others joined up after the regime's rapid military gains or simply to make peace with the system. Only once the blame for the Nazi regime's atrocities had spread beyond Hitler and his immediate cronies were Germans able to recognize their own culpability—a fascist mentality had taken hold and its warped racial ideas and view of humanity had gripped their society. Slow and perhaps not wholly voluntary though this self-examination was, it happened. Here, once again, Islamists are a different case: to date defeated neither militarily nor morally, both internal and external pressure fail to shake its followers' convictions. Indeed, Islamists have no reason to question their own ideas, because they are convinced that the fault is always with others.

The Muslim Brotherhood has been banned three times during Egypt's history—once in the 1940s, once in the 1950s, and most recently in 2013—yet the mentality from which it was born never dissipated, appearing to this day in almost all Egyptian school text-

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books. The inviolability of Islam is the back door by which the group has always managed to return to the center of its society. Notions of jihad as a divine mission, dreams of the victory of Islam, and views of unbelievers as subhuman—all these remain constituent parts of the educational canon of most Islamic states. Selective approaches to history, the manufactured specter of a never-changing enemy, and a belief in Muslims' status as God's chosen spur the very attitudes that serve as terrorism's basis.

Even if many Muslims oppose both Salafism and the Muslim Brotherhood, they remain unwilling to burn bridges with the concept of an Islamic state, deeming the idea itself well and good, but undermined only by faulty implementation. Few see a connection between Islamism's mind-set and the claims of Islam itself. They are set on living in a democracy, but one shaped by Islam, which is the political equivalent of a Mercedes with no engine, drawn by a pair of donkeys instead. Such self-deluded attitudes have always helped Islamism to reinvent itself. Pawning off the same wine in new bottles, today's Islamists are far from finished.

Neither democracy nor modernization succeeded in Japan until its people dragged their own emperor down to Earth from on high, acknowledging him as an ordinary mortal. Prior to that, multitudes of suicidal pilots embroiled in a senseless war had given their lives for him with cries of "*Tennōheika Banzai!*" To this day, few in the Islamic world dare to reappraise the rule of God on Earth, let alone to plot his downfall. Many Muslims fail to recognize that freedom and democracy sit awkwardly with the notion of humanity being issued with orders from on high. Too many still fail to accept that one's actions are more important than one's beliefs, and that no ideology is worth killing for, much less dying for.

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NOTES

INTRODUCTION

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All five of Abdel-Samad's books to date have spurred heated debate in Germany. Published in the last months before the Arab Spring and selling over eighty thousand copies, his book *The End of the Islamic World* predicted a series of political upheavals and civil wars that now threaten to tear the Arab world apart. *Islamic Fascism* became another bestseller, and Abdel-Samad appears frequently as a guest on news and discussion programs across the German-speaking world. His books have now been translated into six languages.

After a June 2013 talk he gave in Cairo on the subject of Islamic fascism, three prominent Egyptian clerics called for Abdel-Samad's death in a fatwah, claiming his statements had defamed Islam and its prophet.

