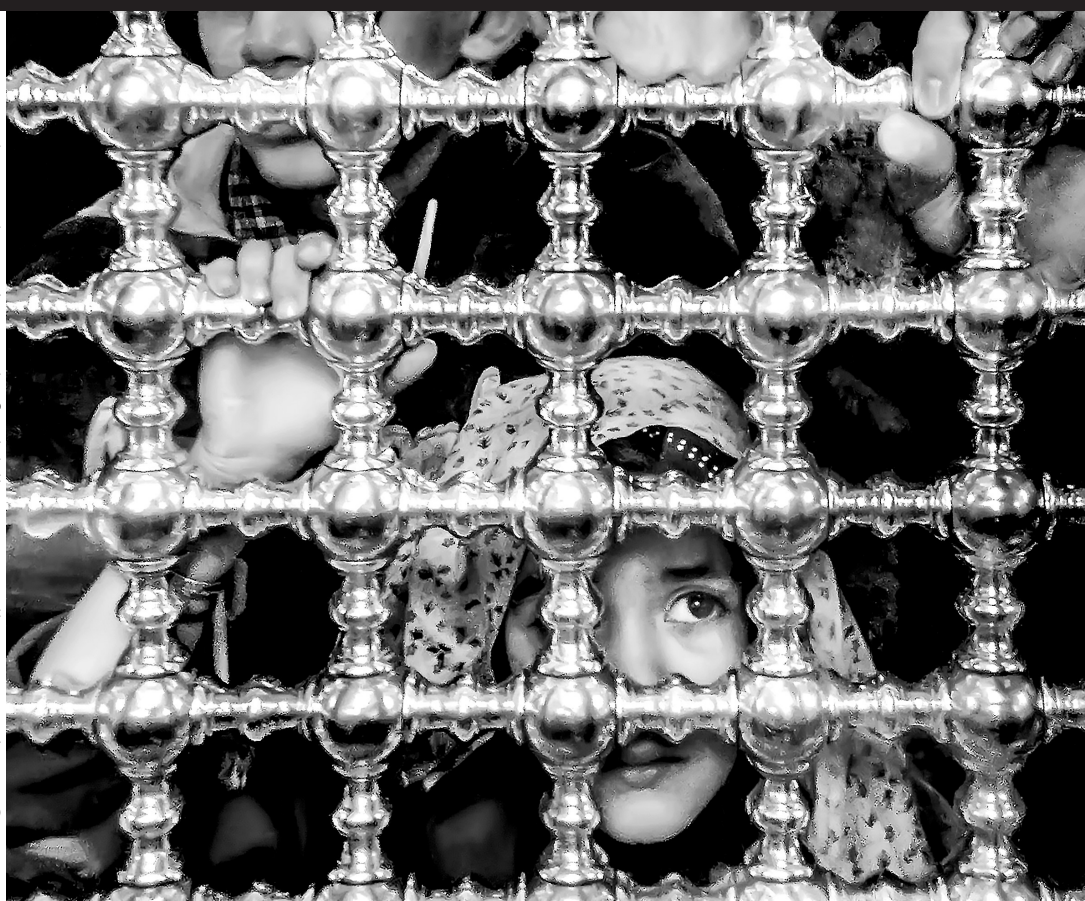


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## A note from the editors

We are delighted to present the eighth and inaugural international edition of the Undergraduate Journal of Middle East Studies. For the past eleven years, editors have striven to provide an academic forum for the presentation of the finest research and findings conducted by undergraduate students on the region of the Middle East. This year, I am honoured to have had the opportunity to lay the foundation for the Journal's further collaboration with undergraduate students and institutions worldwide with whom we hope to enhance the quality of scholarly research and debate. I would like to extend my deepest thanks and gratitude for the invaluable mentorship offered by Professor James A. Reilly and Professor Timothy P. Harrison, who have generously offered me their time and assistance, and, whose guidance has undoubtedly elevated the quality and status of our work. I am particularly indebted to our executive team, the Department of Near & Middle Eastern Civilizations, and the Arts and Sciences Students' Union without whose support and efforts this Journal would not be possible. Finally, I would like to sincerely thank the esteemed members of our advisory board who have generously offered us their time and continued support. It has truly been an honour and privilege to lead this production for the past two years and I hope the Journal will continue to thrive with the support of its readers and further its mandate of depicting a non-monolithic portrait of the region. We hope you enjoy this edition of the Journal.

Shirin Shahidi  
Editor-in-Chief  
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# Literature and Agency in Islamic Discourse

By Haris A. Durrani

*This paper explores the role of amthal (instances of figurative language, translated as “similitudes,” “parables,” or “analogies”) as an element essential to the unity of form and function in Islamic intellectual discourse. The uses of amthal across premodern Islamic discourse — from revelation, to legal and theological treatises, to poetry and narratives by ulema — was for authors an essential means of instilling moral agency in their communities, allowing Muslim intellectuals to transcend textualism, empiricism, and individuality and access internal, divine states through dhawq (spiritual or “fruitional” experience). The use of amthal began to erode with the onset of modernity, causing Islamic discourse to lose the spirit of its law and descend into the polemicism of political theology, dividing form from function in scholarly works; a divide between how a work is communicated and what it communicates. Modern literature may provide a means of catalyzing change proactively: to rise above purely empirical, textual, and polemical discourse and embody the “spirit of the law,” Islamic intellectuals should seek to cross barriers between the academic and literary by integrating the use of amthal in and outside of their scholarly work.*

At the 2014 National Book Awards, the seasoned novelist Ursula K. Le Guin delivered a rousing acceptance speech for an award recognizing her life’s work. She addressed her fellow writers of speculative fiction, “the realists of a larger reality,” with a call to literary arms: “Hard times are coming when we will be wanting the voices of writers who can see alternatives to how we live now, and can see through our fear-stricken society and its obsessive technologies to other ways of being.”<sup>1</sup> Contemporary literature has always borne a fascination for the human consequences of modernity, but there may be more to this than a simple preoccupation. Indeed, can literature serve as not only a mirror of social conditions but a catalyst? Perhaps surprisingly, traditions in *Shari’a* scholarship may provide direction, if not answers, to this question. Most premodern Muslim jurists and scholars were avid Sufis, composing poetry and narrative works alongside their legal treatises. As this paper will argue, the *ulema*’s uses of literature were not forays, experiments, or side projects. The practice was integral to *Shari’a* and participated as a means of instilling moral agency for its societies. This paper will ask: 1) How have the uses of figurative language in Sufi literature,<sup>2</sup> poetry and storytelling served the premodern Islamic legal tradition? 2) How has its use changed with the onset of the modern project, and to what effect? 3) Can the premodern tradition’s use of literature become a model for contemporary movements of proactive resistance

<sup>1</sup> Ursula K. Le Guin. "Neil Gaiman Presents Lifetime Achievement Award to Ursula K. Le Guin." Speech presented at 2014 National Book Awards, New York, November 19, 2014. Video file, 11:36. Vimeo. Accessed December 6, 2014. <http://vimeo.com/112654091>

<sup>2</sup> “Sufi literature” is redundant when discussing premodern scholarship because, paradigmatically, jurists of the premodern era were Sufi. However, I have chosen this language for the sake of clarity and emphasis. By “literature” I include both written works and similar oral traditions, as the latter were often most essential in premodernity.

that are attempting to dismantle the modern project, bringing about truly post-modern “ways of being”?

###

### 1. *Amthal* Enable Moral Agency: Transcending Codified Law and History as Fluid

In this section, I will argue that the use of *amthal* (translated as “similitudes” and “allegories” by Pickthall<sup>3</sup> and as “parable[s]” by Asad<sup>4</sup>) by premodern scholars, jurists in particular, in poetry, fictional narratives, and even treatises, served as a means of enabling the recipients of these works to reach deep internal states and higher truths. These uses of *amthal* also promulgated notions of time and history outside of modern ideas of progress, eschewing empiricism. Ultimately, by appealing to both inner truths and a conception of history as fluid (rather than as positive) on the societal scale, jurists’ use of *amthal* maintained the moral agency of premodern communities.

#

#### 1-a) *Amthal* as a means of transcending codified law by inspiring higher truths (*dhawq*)

The vast majority of jurists across the premodern Muslim world practiced some form of poetry or storytelling, or else employed figurative language within legal doctrines which in the modern era, would otherwise be written in “objective” academic legalese. For jurists, using *amthal* was a means of reaching for a higher, divine reality, not otherwise expressible. Perhaps the most famous *mathal* is that which describes the nature of *amthal* in the first place—the renowned line from the Qur’an from which al-Ghazali wrote *The Niche of Lights*, in which the higher reality of God’s divine presence is described as manifesting as “light upon light” throughout creation. The surreal verse concludes: “And [to this end] God propounds parables [*amthal*] unto men, since God [alone] has full knowledge of all things.”<sup>5</sup> The origins of *amthal* begin with Islam’s foundation: the Qur’an itself. As al-Ghazali emphasizes, God’s divine presence cannot truly be described; it can only be understood through metaphor, through *amthal*.<sup>6</sup> Although al-Ghazali was not known for his poetry, his treatises are well known for their use of colorful analogies which are deeply instructive by suggesting higher truths. For example, he writes in *The Niche of Lights*, “Know also that the visible world in relation to the world of dominion is like the shell in relation to the kernel.”<sup>7</sup> Such *amthal* abound in his work. They are a means of reaching the unknowable by experiencing a deep, inner state (*dhawq*, “fruitful experience”). As he describes in *Deliverance from Error*, *dhawq* accesses the highest form of knowledge, from which rational senses can be checked.<sup>8</sup> The experience of *dhawq* cannot be described in words, but in metaphors. It is in this use of figurative language in their scholarly treatises, poetry, and storytelling that these jurists could suggest deeper truths lying beyond the confines of legal and theological texts.

Indeed, *amthal* enabled and embodied a vision of the *Shari’a* and Islam which transcended codified law or theology. Consider Farid ud-Din Attar’s *The*

<sup>3</sup> Marmaduke Pickthall, trans. *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran* (New York: Knopf, 1930), on Qur’an 22:73, 346 and 24:35, 361.

<sup>4</sup> Muhammad Asad, trans. *The Message of The Qur’an* (New York: The Book Foundation, 2003), on Qur’an 22:73, 517.

<sup>5</sup> Asad, trans., on Qur’an 24:35, 541.

<sup>6</sup> Al-Ghazali, *The Niche of Lights*, trans. David Buchman (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1998), 12.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>8</sup> Al-Ghazali, *Deliverance from Error*, trans. R.J. McCarthy (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2006), 58.



*Conference of the Birds*. The narrative poem is a Russian doll of parables: in itself, the tale is a parable for the journey toward oneness with God, within which Attar has constructed a multitude of smaller parables. He even references the unsubstantiated but oft-quoted *hadith* to “search for knowledge even as far as China.”<sup>9</sup> Indeed, it is the spirit of what this *hadith* means for the essence of the faith, more than an attention to hard fact, which renders it important for Attar. Perhaps fact and value are intertwined by this use of similitudes in poetry. This use of *amthal* is symptomatic of the work’s holistic attempt to inspire in the audience a connection with a higher state of being: with divine knowledge. *The Conference of the Birds* is not only a tale about journeying to become one with the divine; the poem’s spiritual tools, *amthal* themselves, ferry the audience along a spiritual path toward inner truth, and thereby toward oneness with God.

We find a similar unity between form and function throughout the premodern period. In Ibn Tufayl’s *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan*, Hayy discovers higher truths, but the tale itself, through its extended *matal* (the parable of a man living outside of human society), inspires an order of knowledge within the audience that transcends the text. When Hayy reaches the highest stages of *dhawq*, Ibn Tufayl must fall back on *amthal* from the Qur’an, after which he remarks, “Do not ask me to add anything more in words. That would be next to impossible.”<sup>10</sup> Consider also *The Sea of Precious Virtues*, a treatise on the best practices for Muslim rulers, which sticks not to dry commandments but utilizes various parables in order to communicate the spirit of its message. For example, the text tells a story about the bones of dead kings who sat on the throne, a lesson to a Muslim leader to rule with a consciousness that he, like the common person, is subordinate to a higher power.<sup>11</sup> Although not itself an extended *matal* as was the case with Attar and Ibn Tufayl, *The Sea of Precious Virtues* still uses *amthal* as an essential means of communicating higher truths about the nature of morality, leadership, and justice; of waging the greater *jihad* in the inner “battle against the soul.”<sup>12</sup> Through all of these, *amthal* were not used solely to front theology or legal doctrine at face value. They transcended these empirical realms by evoking in audiences the spirit of the law. The figurative language of *amthal* has the ability to inspire audiences to reach toward their inner states, accessing these less empirical and higher truths through *dhawq*. This is at the root of Sufism, which was paradigmatic to premodern Muslim ways of being.

Accessing internal truth was integral to Islamic conceptions of free will and agency. As such, the prevalent—if not paradigmatic—use of *amthal* by *ulema* throughout the premodern period rendered critical impact on the moral agency of their societies. By assimilating “self to God (so far as lies in human power),” a Muslim unifies his or her will with God’s, “not as something alien” but as a Platonic means of fulfilling one’s own existence.<sup>13</sup>

By reaching an inner state of higher truth through *dhawq*, one shirks

<sup>9</sup> Farid ud-Din Attar, *The Conference of the Birds*, trans. Afkham Darbandi and Dick Davis (London: Penguin Books, 1984), 181. Al-Ghazali also frequently used unsubstantiated *hadith* because, despite being empirically in question, these narratives reverberated with the spirit of the law.

<sup>10</sup> Abu Bakr Ibn Tufayl, *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan*, trans. Lenn Evan Goodman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 155. Consider also the introductory remarks by Lenn Goodman on Ibn Tufayl’s “Educational Philosophy,” in which Hayy is described as a symbol (*amthal*) for Adam or mankind. For him, “Wisdom seeks more than knowledge: it seeks an active relationship of love with the beloved, and with God.” (11)

<sup>11</sup> Julie Scott Meisami, trans., *The Sea of Precious Virtues* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1991), 212.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>13</sup> Goodman, Introduction, *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan*, 17.

external influences (*jihad al-nafs*) and aligns with divine will, like a moth consumed in flame, as in al-Hallaj's refrain, "I am He whom I love / and He whom I love is I!"<sup>14</sup> This butts heads with the modern conception of un-thinkingness in the "banality of evil," as described by Arendt, whereby individuals are barred from accessing their inner conscience. As she wrote of Hitler's regime,<sup>15</sup> "Evil in the Third Reich had lost the quality by which most people recognize it—the quality of temptation." Instead, "the law of Hitler's land" controlled the people's "voice of conscience."<sup>16</sup> In contrast, *amthal*, seen as a means of inspiring *dhawq*, provide a path toward moral agency.

#

### 1-b) *Amthal* as a means of conceiving fluid notions of history

The use of *amthal* by premodern *ulema* instilled moral agency within their societies in another way: by presenting a conception of history outside of modern ideas of progress. Consider the example of Ibn Battuta's travels. They are rife with "tall tales" of mystics who can freeze minds,<sup>17</sup> jogis that can transform into floating cubes,<sup>18</sup> and trees which shed leaves bearing *hadith*.<sup>19</sup> Mysticism is a prevalent element in *The Travels of Ibn Battuta*, with *amthal* evoking deep truths about, for example, the nature of free will in the case of the sheikh who freezes the minds of his dinner guests, or the peril of knowledge in the case of the transforming jogis. Ibn Battuta did not set out to render complete sociological treatises on the various peoples he encountered and their histories, as was the case with Ibn Khaldun's *Muqaddimah*. His narrative's focus on anecdotes and mystical stories indicates that he was chiefly interested in history as a form of entertainment, not as an empirical means by which present conditions were defined. Ibn Battuta did not establish empirical notions of history, but fluid ones.

By using *amthal* to conceive of history as fluid, Ibn Battuta's narrative runs counter to modern notions of progress. Time was not positive, creative, unfolding, as it was, perhaps, for Ibn Khaldun. In *The Muqaddimah*, Ibn Khaldun writes of building knowledge from *tabula rasa* through "sensual perception" and the "ability to think," but he does not speak of *dhawq*.<sup>20</sup> On poetry, he argues that "Speech is like a mould for ideas" but does not contain ideas themselves,<sup>21</sup> which seems to disregard the importance of *amthal* as an aid to *dhawq*. This notion of language counters Nietzsche's characterization of knowledge as "a mobile army of metaphors," that "truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are."<sup>22</sup> But for premodern Islamic scholarship, history and its language was not a tool of epistemic violence by which the subject—Ibn Battuta's audience (or perhaps Ibn Battuta himself)—was transformed, reshaped, and restructured by such a "mobile army of metaphors," which for Nietzsche represented the fabricated truth of an empirical universe. For Ibn Battuta and the host of similar narratives of his time, *amthal* allowed for the fluidity of history, free from the external pressures

<sup>14</sup> Al-Ghazali, *The Niche of Lights*, 16.

<sup>15</sup> Note that the Third Reich was far from an exception of modernity—it was a symptom of it.

<sup>16</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin Group, 2006), 150.

<sup>17</sup> Ibn Battuta, *The Travels of Ibn Battuta*, trans. Samuel Lee (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 53.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

<sup>20</sup> Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, trans. Franz Rosenthal (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 340.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>22</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense." In *The Viking Portable Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking, 1968), 46-47.

of positive time and of a strictly empirical, causally-driven view. *Amthal* were a key ingredient in this project, an erosion of the modern barrier between fact and value, a means toward the premodern *Weltanschauung* in which reality was not empirical but “enchanted,” intertwined inseparably with the unknowable.<sup>23</sup>

#

What kind of agency was instilled by these uses of *amthal*? To this point I have left the term “audience” undefined, and now that the question of moral agency has been settled, I would like to define and contextualize the audiences *ulema* addressed in their works. It is important to emphasize that their works were rarely received by individuals but, as in communal prayer, by groups—by communities.<sup>24</sup> Their poems were performed to crowds, and legal doctrines were not merely codified—they were lived and expressed through organic relationships between jurists and their communities. Even historical accounts, such as Ibn Battuta’s travels, served as a form of communal entertainment, to the extent that perhaps *The Travels of Ibn Battuta* as a text is but a relic of what it meant to these communities as a series of oral narratives. Vital to the premodern Islamic tradition was oral communication, which lived in the social space between individuals rather than with individuals themselves (which is the case for purely textual sources). Therefore, like communal prayer, the deep internal states inspired through the *amthal* described above were reached within communal contexts. Agency was inspired not only within individuals but, more importantly, for communities writ large. In perhaps the same way al-Ghazali’s “technologies of the self” contributed to achieving good disposition,<sup>25</sup> which would lead toward a more fully-realized agency (through higher forms of knowledge accessed through deeper internal states), *amthal*, then, were a means toward the moral agency of premodern Muslim communities. In other words, *amthal* were a critical means of performing *jihad-al-nafs*, with implications for the sociomoral fabric of premodern societies.

###

## 2. Modernity, Empiricism, and the Rise of Polemics

The use of *amthal* both as an extended similitude (as with parables like *The Conference of the Birds* or *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan*) and within “academia” (such as the figurative language and parables in *The Sea of Precious Virtues* or the legal and theological treatises of al-Ghazali, or with nonfiction narratives like Ibn Battuta’s) represents a paradigm within premodern Islamic discourse and the way in which it fostered the spirituality and moral agency of its communities. Yet as one approaches the modern era, the use of *amthal* becomes overshadowed by the straightforward, empirical language of polemic. Ibn Khaldun’s *Muqaddimah* suddenly became popular because of its empirical, sociological approach. Similarly, *ulema*, even those with great poetic abilities like Sayyid Qutb,<sup>26</sup> became well known via their more straightforward doctrines, declarations, and treatises. Leaders from Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini to Yusuf Al-Qaradawi to Muhammad Faraj gained authority and popularity because they were known for their doctrines more than their poetry, storytelling, or figurative language. This is not to say that *amthal* were not

<sup>23</sup> Wael Hallaq, *The Impossible State* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 164-66.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 55-7.

<sup>25</sup> Al-Ghazali, *On Disciplining the Self*, trans. Muhammad Nur Abdus Salaam (Chicago: Great Books of the Islamic World, 2010), generally, as well as Hallaq, Chapter 5 in *The Impossible State*, “The Political Subject and Moral Technologies of the Self.”

<sup>26</sup> Hamid Algar, introduction to *Social Justice in Islam*, by Sayyid Qutb, 1-17. Translated by John B. Hardie and Hamid Algar (Oneonta: Islamic Publications International, 2000), 1-2 and 7-8.

employed, or that all *ulema* became polemicists. Poetry was used, for example, by Faraj in his treatise “The Neglected Duty” when he quotes ‘Abdullah ibn Mubarak, though poetry is cited in the service of propaganda, of rallying behind *jihad* for political ideology,<sup>27</sup> rather than of instilling in the reader a deep, internal state through *dhawq*. Similarly, the Charter of Hamas quotes Muhammad Iqbal<sup>28</sup> and toasts the value of Islamic art and literature, but its purpose is merely for the sake of “ideological education and invigorating nourishment” to maintain “high spirits” in hard times.<sup>29</sup> Not all modern *ulema* are polemicists, but on the whole it appears that the rise of the modern project has eroded the essential role and purpose of *amthal* in Islamic discourse.

This shift away from the centrality of *amthal* in Islamic discourse has deep consequences for the moral agency of Muslim communities today. *Shari’a* has lost its essence not only because modern legal systems have resulted in the codification of its law, but because the language of *Shari’a*—or at least of those who claim to lead it—has itself lost its essence. The “popular” *ulema* are no longer trained jurists by necessity, and are no longer known for their poetry or use of figurative language as much as they are known for the force or persuasiveness of their political ideology. As with Ibn Khaldun, form and function are not approached in unison. *Shari’a* no longer lives in parables, narratives, and figurative language that seek to encapsulate the spirit of the law. Through this erosion of *amthal* in and tangent to juristic practice, *Shari’a* has become direct, straightforward, and rigid. It belongs to the empirical.

The sad irony of the situation is that many of these modern scholars believe the strength of their straightforward polemics is a means of resisting the modern project and constructing Islamic ways of being that are independent of it—yet the diminished prevalence of *amthal* in their texts suggests that the opposite is at work. If *amthal* are a means, through *dhawq*, of instilling agency in an audience, then the erosion of *amthal* is detrimental to this agency. Scholars of Islam may be calling for a return (whatever this may mean for them) to Islamic ways of being, but the form does not match the function of their written work. In function, their imperative is toward new ways of being, however mired in political ideology; in form they employ the rigid, empirical methods of modern political writing, where *amthal* are tools of promoting political ideas rather than a means by which audiences can understand ideas not capable of being put into words, let alone promoted or propagandized. Without *amthal*, modern Islamic discourse fails to take that next step into al-Ghazali’s higher state of knowledge, and thereby leaves audiences within the unchecked realms of “sense-data” and rational faculty, within the world of empiricism and positive history. As a result, external factors—the “technologies of the self” of the modern state, as Wael Hallaq describes in the *Impossible State*<sup>30</sup>—become the driving force for action. Perhaps this is why, for all their talk about dismantling the modern state, the range of scholars today, from “moderate” Islamists to jihadists, have merely served to continue modern ways of being. Across the spectrum, the rhetoric appears dangerously reactive. Indeed, *Shari’a* was nothing without the spirit of its law. And the spirit of the law was upheld,

<sup>27</sup> Muhammad ‘Abd Al-Salaam Faraj, “The Neglected Duty,” in *Princeton Readings in Islamist Thought*, ed. Roxanne L. Euben and Muhammad Qasim Zaman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 330.

<sup>28</sup> Hamas, “Charter of the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) of Palestine,” in *Princeton Readings in Islamist Thought*, ed. Roxanne L. Euben and Muhammad Qasim Zaman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 367.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 374.

<sup>30</sup> Hallaq, *The Impossible State*, 117.

at least in good part, by the spiritual and communal role of *amthal* within and tangent to its practice.

#

### 3. Modern Literature As a Catalyst for Change

Perhaps predictably, the landscape appears bleak. But the conundrum *Shari'a* faces today may find an ally in modern literature, and, as I will argue, premodern *Shari'a* can inform today's literature in valuable ways. Integrating *amthal* into the language of today's *ulema* and their practices may serve as a means toward change, but the critical question I would like to pose is whether modern literature, Muslim or otherwise, can employ the premodern Islamic understanding of *amthal* in order to proactively forge new ways of being outside of the modern project.

Authors today already understand their use of parables and figurative language in much the same way that premodern *ulema* thought of *amthal*. In the introduction to her classic novel *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Le Guin writes that literature "says in words what cannot be said in words," accessing higher truths not capable of comprehension in straightforward language. For Le Guin, "all fiction is metaphor," and her adherence to speculative fiction is merely an extension of this. As with the *amthal* in Qur'anic and premodern Islamic writings, Le Guin is not bound to empiricism. Fiction—"lies"—is her means of expressing reality. In an almost Sufi turn of phrase, she writes: "I talk about the gods; I am an atheist. But I am an artist too, and therefore a liar. Distrust everything I say. I am telling the truth."<sup>31</sup> Similarly, it is quite obvious<sup>32</sup> that God is not actually light (literally speaking, "light upon light" is not even logically sound), and it would be ludicrous to believe a flock of talking birds would decide to go on any kind of journey for a mystical creature. Yet, as with Le Guin, these "lies," these "metaphors" and parables—*amthal*—are a vital means toward expressing unutterable truths and engendering these truths in the hearts and minds of audiences.

If, like premodern Islamic works, modern literature has the ability to transcend empiricism and access higher truths, does this imply that modern literature can also instill moral agency within its audiences, acting as a catalyst for movement away from the modern project? This problem returns us to the defining question of the audience. Whereas forms of *amthal* were received orally within communal contexts in premodern Muslim societies, literature and its metaphors are today received textually and individually. It is true that literature today is often experienced orally and communally through intellectual or social events such as book readings, spoken word poetry performances, and so on, but paradigmatically literature is not received in the same way as in premodern Islamic discourse. It is received individually and textually rather than communally. Modern literature, then, inspires agency for the individual but not necessarily for the community. It is an individually-experienced *jihad al-nafs* rather than a communal one.

By birthing agency within the individual audience member, modern literature encounters the Kantian problem of unbound knowledge. In other words, while it is true that literature may inspire deeper understandings akin to

<sup>31</sup> Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Left Hand of Darkness* (New York: Ace Books, 2010), i-xix.

<sup>32</sup> Some modern *ulema*'s fixation with taking every verse in the Qur'an at literal face value is another indication of the erosion of the value of *amthal* in modern Islamic discourse. Surely God does not sit on a physical throne!

*dhawq*, they are not bound by a “social praxis,”<sup>33</sup> by a sociomoral fabric which works to form al-Ghazali’s “good disposition” and maintains the strength of its moral imperative. If we hypothetically consider the opposite case—if modern literature were received communally and orally—it would be a stretch to then claim that communal reception of a work would inherently entail moral bounds on knowledge. As previously stated, Arendt wrote of evil in the Third Reich as losing “the quality of temptation,” with social and legal norms governing the community’s moral agency. The grassroots is as integral to the modern project as its most obvious proponents, its lawmakers and executors. It would be unreasonable to assume that literature and *amthal* as they were received and understood in premodern Islamic societies could even exist under modern conditions. Given this, perhaps the current manner in which literature is received—textually, individually—is a lesser evil. At the very least, literature’s emphasis on a unity of function and form, as was the case for premodern discourse, seems partly capable of moving hearts and minds out of the mire of the modern way of being. It is a catalyst of sorts, a *jihad* waged not with physical violence, but epistemic.

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In sum, it is now clear that the prevalence of *amthal* across the scope of premodern Islamic discourse, from revelation to legal and theological treatises, to poetry and narratives by *ulema*, was an essential means of achieving moral agency for their communities by transcending textualism, empiricism, and individuality and accessing internal, divine states with *dhawq*. This use of *amthal* began to erode with the onset of modernity, causing Islamic discourse to lose the spirit of the law and descend into the polemicism of political theology, dividing form from function.

For literature in Islamic discourse to truly become a catalyst for a shift away from the modern project, the problem seems to lie in the divide between literature and academia. Whereas premodern *ulema* were steeped in poetry and narrative, using *amthal* in even their most scholarly treatises on law or theology, it is not customary, on a paradigmatic level, for *ulema* today to practice both. There are writers, and there are scholars, but rarely are they one and the same. Modern academia may speak of the unknowable, of *dhawq* and of higher knowledge, but it communicates in the language of empiricism; modern literature may speak of the empirical and of morality or community, but it communicates to the individual in metaphors, the language of the unknowable. Perhaps this is a manifestation of the schism between fact and value. As Booker-Prize finalist Hisham Matar said, “Perhaps the focus [of literature] should not be on unifying the personal and political but rather on the gravity between them...Art might just be that—a gesture of hope. The hope involved in artistic creation that has its feet in the gutter of reality and poverty and injustice, and has its eyes on the stars...It is the hope of active engagement of human reality, a hope implicated in history.”<sup>35</sup> In the same way literature must cross the boundaries between personal and political, between individual and community, Muslim intellectuals—and modern society in general—must be comfortable crossing between the academic and the literary. In order to truly

<sup>33</sup> Hallaq, *The Impossible State*, 55.

<sup>34</sup> Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 150.

<sup>35</sup> Hisham Matar, “Narratives of Social Protest: Personal and Political,” speech, Columbia University, New York, October 17, 2014.



enable Islamic discourse to instill agency and catalyze paradigm shifts which forge new futures, modern ulema must walk the ground between academia and literature, the knowable and the unknowable.



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# Vulgärmaterialismus in the Late Ottoman Empire and Early Turkish Republic

By Pia Morar

*This paper analyses the influence of German intellectual currents of the mid-nineteenth century on the intellectual movements of the late Ottoman Empire and the policies of the early Turkish Republic established by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. It emphasizes how Atatürk's reforms were not individually contrived by him; rather, the development of such ideologies was possible due to his upbringing, which was shaped by secular Western institutions and the beliefs of the late Ottoman intellectuals. Through the Young Turk movement, Atatürk was first confronted with the philosophy of scientism. This is the idea that science is the highest authority in human learning. It is based on the belief that science is unified, limitless, and exceedingly beneficial to humanity. The late Ottoman intellectuals, some of whom became the leaders of the Young Turks, were, in turn, powerfully stimulated by the German materialist movement, particularly Vulgärmaterialismus. This is a German interpretation of materialism that places great emphasis on "scientific truth" as a guiding principle for social organization. This paper focuses on how the scientific perspective – based on materialism and Vulgärmaterialismus – forwarded primarily by Carl Vogt and Ludwig Büchner, influenced the intellectual circles and the Young Turks of the late Ottoman Empire, specifically, Besir Fu'ad (1852-87), Abdullah Cedit (1869-1932), and Baha Tevfik. It examines how their understanding, and to a greater extent misinterpretation, of German materialism came to shape Ottoman society at the time, and subsequently, the formation of the Turkish Republic under Atatürk.*

Mustafa Kemal (later known as Mustafa Kemal Atatürk) is a national figurehead in Turkey, revered for bringing about the modern Turkish state from a declining Ottoman Empire. Kemalism, the ideology associated with Kemal, and its reforms were considered highly progressive, and the cult surrounding Atatürk and his secular principles prevail to this day in Turkey. Yet, it is important to realize that Atatürk did not individually contrive these practical and intellectual advancements; rather, the development of such ideologies was possible due to his upbringing, which was shaped by the secular Western institutions of the late Ottoman Empire.<sup>1</sup> The emergence of secular organizations and a scientific *Weltanschauung* were part of the Young Turks' belief system at the time.<sup>2</sup> Through the Young Turk movement, Atatürk was first confronted with the philosophy of scientism. This is the idea that science is the highest authority in human learning. It is based on the belief that science is unified, limitless, accurate in prediction to the point of infallibility, and

<sup>1</sup> M. Şükrü Hanioglu, *Atatürk: An Intellectual Biography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 1-7.

<sup>2</sup> Emre Kongar, "Turkey's Cultural Transformation." In *The Transformation of Turkish Culture, The Atatürk Legacy 1986*. ed. by G. Renda (Princeton: Kingston, 1986), 19-68.



exceedingly beneficial to humanity.<sup>3</sup> The late Ottoman intellectuals, some of whom became the leaders of the Young Turks, were, in turn, powerfully stimulated by the German materialist movement, particularly *Vulgärmaterialismus*.<sup>4</sup>

This paper will focus on how the scientific perspective – based on materialism and *Vulgärmaterialismus* – forwarded primarily by Carl Vogt and Ludwig Büchner, influenced the intellectual circles and Young Turks of the late Ottoman Empire, specifically, Besir Fu'ad (1852-87), Abdullah Cedet (1869-1932), and Baha Tevfik. It will examine how their understanding, and to a greater extent their misinterpretation, of German materialism came to shape Ottoman society at the time, and subsequently, the formation of the Turkish Republic under Atatürk.

In order to determine the impact these European philosophies had on the late Ottoman Empire and Turkish Republic, it is important to look directly to their sources. German materialist thought gained momentum in the middle of the 19th century through the publication of scientific journals. It emphasized the superiority of science and diminished religion to a primitive belief system of the pre-enlightenment period.<sup>5</sup> Although materialists and philosophers differed in their specific beliefs, a consistent aspect of German materialism was its glorification of a unitary, universal scientific truth inherent in 'genuine' sciences, such as life and cosmological sciences.<sup>6</sup> Materialist scholars of this era examined human relationships to animals and the natural world and determined that human consciousness was a mere neurological material phenomenon.<sup>7</sup> Their primary conclusion was that prevalent belief and faith systems were outdated, and ought to be replaced with scientific knowledge and understanding.<sup>8</sup> The physiologist Jakob Moleschott, zoologist Carl Vogt, and physician Ludwig Büchner, are considered the primary proponents of the theories that shaped the late Ottoman identity. Vogt and Büchner's works, in particular, will be analyzed in more detail to underline its significance. The German scientific materialists were, in turn, profoundly influenced by the work of August Comte, and Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species*. They were, however, more interested in using Darwinian arguments against the Church, than engaging with his theory itself.<sup>9</sup> Although Karl Vogt, Ludwig Büchner and Jacob Moleschott gained tremendous popularity in their day, their 'scientific' undertakings have largely fallen into oblivion, apart from their being mentioned in Russian satire, and, interestingly, their effect on late Ottoman thought and policies of the Turkish Republic. A segment of the Ottoman intellectuals took hold of these ideas through French translations. Later these beliefs were disseminated through military colleges and European schools. This

<sup>3</sup> Tom Sorell, *Scientism: Philosophy and the Infatuation with Science* (London: Routledge, 1991), 1-20.

<sup>4</sup> This is an interpretation of materialism that never took root among German intellectuals themselves, but was highly influential in the period of the Late Ottoman Empire and early Turkish Republic, and in other regions of the Middle East. This intellectual movement placed great emphasis on "scientific truth." Members of this movement examined the relationship of humans to the animal world and deduced that human consciousness was simply a result of neural matter. Influential proponents of this movement treated science and philosophy as equal. Due to its strong reliance on empiricism, Karl Marx and his fellow philosophers referred to this movement as *Vulgärmaterialismus* (vulgar materialism) See Elisabeth Özdalga, *Late Ottoman Society: The Intellectual Legacy* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2005), 7, 29-30.

<sup>5</sup> M. Şükrü Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution: The Young Turks, 1902-1908* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 138.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 138-140.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Özdalga, *Late Ottoman Society*, 29.

<sup>9</sup> Gabriel Ward Finkelstein, *Emil Du Bois-Reymond: Neuroscience, Self, and Society in Nineteenth-century Germany* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2013), 260.

development would have a profound impact on the future of the Turkish state.<sup>10</sup>

Certain branches of German materialism promoted a scientific worldview, free of philosophy. This is seen in Carl Vogt's work, *Vorlesungen über den Menschen, seine Stellung in der Schöpfung und in der Geschichte der Erde*.<sup>11</sup> For Vogt, solely logical, consequential thinkers – the materialists – were worth studying; all other perceptions were narrow-minded and idiotic.<sup>12</sup> He regarded philosophy, specifically, metaphysics, as well as theology and naturalistic philosophy, as meager by-products of science.<sup>13</sup> Vogt argues this point in *Vorlesungen über den Menschen*: "Ist es ja doch ziemlich allerlei, ob Schopenhauer den Unterschied des Menschen vom Affen in den Willen, Herr Bischoff in München dagegen (auch ein Philosoph) in das Selbstbewusstsein setzt!"<sup>14</sup> Here, Vogt seeks to demonstrate the significance of focusing on materialist occurrences in the present, rather than abstract philosophical speculations. He compares human skulls with animal skeletons to determine ostensibly deep-rooted racial differences, thus basing them on "scientific" facts. Although Vogt perceived Darwin's evolutionary theory as a speculative naturalistic philosophy, he nevertheless thought that it could function as a theory which eliminated the notion that a divine being impinged on the process of human development.<sup>15</sup> Vogt supported polygenism, the view that various humanoid monkey species developed independently of each other, and that different human races had emerged from these.<sup>16</sup> He relied on anatomical methodology to support his racist and sexist perspectives. His 'scientific' evidence was based on anatomy. He considered African people inferior, in particular, black women, who were regarded as the lowest rank of the human species. Vogt believed that the Germanic and the African peoples existed on opposite ends of the spectrum of the human race; the difference between them was as great as the distinction between two individual species of monkeys.<sup>17</sup> This ideology, particularly his notions of race, would play a significant role in Atatürk's early Republic.

Unlike Vogt, Ludwig Büchner sought to reconcile philosophy and science. He was a physician, scientist, and philosopher, and one of the most productive adherents of scientific materialism.<sup>18</sup> Büchner asserted that just as religion, which had, according to him, once been the dominant belief system and was now fading into oblivion, so too, speculative philosophy would gradually disintegrate: "Nichts ist widerlicher, als jene anscheinend tiefelehrte philosophische Renommisterei, welche sich mit Hohlheit brüstet, und welche glücklicherweise in unseren Tagen einen mächtigen Damm in den ... tausend Erfolgen ... der empirischen Wissenschaften gefunden hat."<sup>19</sup> Büchner regarded himself as *the* philosopher whose duty it was to transform science into the

<sup>10</sup> Hanioglu, *Atatürk*, 49.

<sup>11</sup> "Lectures on Man, his place in Creation and in the History of the Earth."

<sup>12</sup> Steffen Hasslauer, *Polemik Und Argumentation in Der Wissenschaft Des 19. Jahrhunderts Eine Pragmalinguistische Untersuchung Der Auseinandersetzung Zwischen Carl Vogt Und Rudolph Wagner Um Die 'Seele'* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), 89-101.

<sup>13</sup> Carl Vogt, *Bilder Aus Dem Thierleben* (Frankfurt Am Main: Literarische Anstalt, 1852), 167.

<sup>14</sup> "It is ultimately irrelevant, whether Schopenhauer determines that the difference between man and the ape lie in the will, while Mr. Bischoff in Munich (also a philosopher!) places it in self-consciousness."

<sup>15</sup> Carl Vogt, *Vorlesungen Über Den Menschen Seine Stellung in Der Schöpfung Und in Der Geschichte Der Erde: 1-2*. Band (1863), 366.

<sup>16</sup> Gerhard Heberer, *Menschliche Abstammungslehre. Fortschritte Der Anthropogenie 1863-1964* (Stuttgart: G. Fischer, 1965), 2-5.

<sup>17</sup> Vogt, *Vorlesungen Über Den Menschen Seine Stellung*, 216-235.

<sup>18</sup> Todd H Weir, *Secularism and Religion in Nineteenth-century Germany: The Rise of the Fourth Confession* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 92.

<sup>19</sup> "Nothing is more repulsive than the ostensibly well-taught philosophical boastfulness, which brags about its hollowness. Luckily it has encountered an obstacle in the thousand successes of empirical science." See Ludwig Büchner, *Kraft Und Stoff: Naturphilosophische Untersuchungen Auf Tatsächlicher Grundlage* (Frankfurt a M.: Meidinger Sohn, 1876), 126.

philosophy of the modern era.<sup>20</sup> In his influential work *Kraft und Stoff*, he argued that the quintessential purpose of the scientist was to obtain empirical, factual truth.<sup>21</sup> He promoted the idea of a new religion that would substitute the flawed convictions of the past. Through this new philosophy, people would understand: "dass die Welt nicht die Verwirklichung eines einheitlichen Schöpfergedankens ist, sondern ein Komplex von Dingen und Tatsachen ist – den wir erkennen müssen, wie er ist, nicht wie ihn unsere Fantasie gerne ersinnen möchte."<sup>22</sup> In a letter to a friend Büchner complained: "die moderne Welt ist es müde ewig vom Himmel und von jenseitiger Gerechtigkeit unterhalten zu werden, sie will Gerechtigkeit, Glück und Liebe... schon hier auf Erden."<sup>23</sup> Thus, to him, everyone was a citizen of an ideal state, in which a new religion would replace the old belief system without holy books, or priests.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, he imagined a new moral structure, which could only flourish after the victory of science.<sup>25</sup> Büchner urged that humans seek a future whose basis for society would be different than one based on religion.<sup>26</sup>

The impact of German materialism on late Ottoman society will be directly examined through the works of three leading Ottoman materialists: the positivist and naturalist Besir Fu'ad (1852-87), Abdullah Cevdet (1869-1932), who promoted materialist ideology and the conjunction between Islam and materialism, and Baha Tevfik (1884-1914), who revived German materialism for future Ottoman intellectual circles.<sup>27</sup>

The effect of Büchner's work was extensive among the Ottoman elite, particularly among those who were educated in the West. The first reaction to Büchner, however, was relatively negative. Ali Suavi, a prominent young Ottoman, declared Büchner a prophet of the modern era. He grudgingly accepted that several uninformed intellectuals had fallen prey to Büchner's ideas due to his ingenuousness.<sup>28</sup> Yet within a brief period, the German vulgar materialist had become an intellectual idol for Ottoman society. Seventeen years after its initial publication, his *magnum opus* was translated into seventeen languages including those spoken in the Ottoman Empire (including Turkish, Greek, Bulgarian, etc.).<sup>29</sup> In urban areas, his works sparked heavy debates among Muslim intellectuals after the 1880s, and again in 1908.<sup>30</sup> Thus, with a growing body of translated works dealing with materialist literature, science emerged as a focal point for the replacement of religion. Yet this was difficult to promote due to the profoundly religious heritage and history of the Ottoman Empire. In fact, 'science' and 'religious learning' were both conceptualized using the term '*ilm*, which signifies their perceived interconnectedness.<sup>31</sup> Eventually, newspapers and journals began to penetrate the public consciousness with the 'science versus religion' debate, in which

<sup>20</sup> Özdalga, *Late Ottoman Society*, 30.

<sup>21</sup> Büchner, *Kraft Und Stoff*, 503.

<sup>22</sup> "That the world is not the uniform realization of the creator's thought. Instead it is a complex, consisting of objects and facts. We must recognize these as they are, as opposed to how our imagination would like to conceive them." See Büchner, *Kraft Und Stoff*, xiv.

<sup>23</sup> "The modern world was tired of hearing about heaven and otherworldly justice, instead it strove to achieve these ideals here, on earth." See Büchner, *Kraft Und Stoff*, xiv.

<sup>24</sup> Ludwig Büchner, *Das künftige Leben und die moderne Wissenschaft: Zehn Briefe an eine Freundin* (Leipzig: Max Spohr, 1889), 141.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>26</sup> Özdalga, *Late Ottoman Society*, 31.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>29</sup> Frederick Gregory, *Scientific Materialism in Nineteenth Century Germany* (Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel Pub., 1977), 238.

<sup>30</sup> Özdalga, *Late Ottoman Society*, 32.

<sup>31</sup> Gabor Agoston, *Encyclopedia of the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Facts On File, 2009), 506.

science was portrayed as a panacea, while religion was perceived as primitive and superstitious.<sup>32</sup>

One of the most successful materialist writers among the Ottoman intellectuals was Besir Fu'ad. He harshly criticized religion in line with his interpretation of, and admiration for Büchner's books.<sup>33</sup> He idolized *Kraft und Stoff* as a point of departure for renewing Ottoman intellectual thought, which, he believed, should focus on eliminating non-scientific approaches such as 'poetry' and refer to pure science.<sup>34</sup> In this regard his vulgar materialist conception was even more reductionist than Buchner's, as he viewed science as supreme while denigrating all other subjects as inferior. One of his most significant achievements was the increased circulation of popular science writings. Fu'ad accomplished this by translating several French and German materialist journals dealing with broad 'scientific' subjects ranging from the human body to cosmology.<sup>35</sup> The enormous impact German materialism had on the Ottoman intellectuals is embodied in Fu'ad's life, which was dedicated to the spread of these ideals, right up until his death. He committed suicide in 1887, as a 'scientific experiment' which was to be the culmination of his life's work. He slit his veins and then continued to write about his declining state, as evidence that life was nothing but a scientific occurrence.<sup>36</sup>

Another leading Ottoman intellectual who was greatly influenced by German scientism was Abdullah Cevdet, a devoted atheist.<sup>37</sup> He was considered the most radical materialist of this era. Cevdet promoted the notion of a secularized society based on a clear separation of religion and state. He believed that it was his mission to lead Ottoman Muslims from their religious outlook to a scientific worldview. Just as Carl Vogt and Ludwig Büchner argued strongly against the Church, he harbored harsh criticisms against the sheiks and the clergy.<sup>38</sup> Interestingly, Abdullah Cevdet was raised in a pious and religious household, and there are records of religious, devotional poems written early in his life. His views first began to shift when he entered the Royal Medical Academy.<sup>39</sup> This school was strongly oriented around materialism and functioned as a 'breeding ground' for young Ottoman materialists. Cevdet was, in this way, a product of his time.<sup>40</sup>

Abdullah Cevdet can be thought of as an Eastern version of Büchner. Like Büchner, he was a physician, who subscribed to a worldview based on the omnipresent truth of science and the scientific method.<sup>41</sup> However, his reading of Büchner's work led him to a curious conclusion. Abdullah Cevdet analyzed Islamic sources to establish the extent to which the interpreters of the *shariah* (Islamic law) were reconcilable with Büchner's philosophy. He determined that Islamic philosophers had viewed philosophy as an accumulation of all sciences,

<sup>32</sup> Özdalga, *Late Ottoman Society*, 32.

<sup>33</sup> Niyazi Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1964), 293-294.

<sup>34</sup> Özdalga, *Late Ottoman Society*, 34.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> In 1889 he assisted in the creation of the Ottoman Union Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), which opposed the absolutist rule of Abdulhamid II. For this reason, he was exiled along with other significant CUP members. He later resided in Switzerland until her returned to the Ottoman Empire in 1911. See Charles Kurzman, *Modernist Islam: 1840-1940: A Sourcebook* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 172.

<sup>38</sup> Finkelstein, *Emil Du Bois-Reymond*, 260.

<sup>39</sup> At the time, many high-ranking Ottoman officials sent their children to be educated in European schools or Ottoman European schools, where European ideologies flourished. Similar to Abdullah Cevdet, Mustafa Kemal would likewise be shaped by the Western-oriented military school he attended. See Hanioglu, M. S. *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 102.

<sup>40</sup> Özdalga, *Late Ottoman Society*, 37.

<sup>41</sup> Serif Mardin, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought: A Study in the Modernization of Turkish Political Ideas* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 176.

for example philology, geology, and paleontology. By applying such methods and appealing to the religious culture of the late Ottoman era Abdullah Cevdet sought to sway the public.<sup>42</sup> His primary goal was to educate the masses and to facilitate the spread of scientific knowledge and create a modern socially engineered society, consistent with the scientist paradigm. Although he regarded himself as an atheist and believed in a secular society, he nevertheless perceived a refined version of Islam as a useful tool to create a society receptive to the advancement of science.<sup>43</sup> For him “science [was] the religion of the elite, whereas religion [was] the science of the masses.”<sup>44</sup> He argued that science should be promoted in Islamic terms to the public, as the uneducated masses would be more receptive to the subject if it was promoted in a familiar framework.<sup>45</sup> This goal prompted him to found the *Ictihad*, which was a periodical containing the most important European intellectual currents of the time. In this journal he disseminated numerous ideas that were later put into practice under Atatürk. These included the education of females, a distrust of monarchical absolutist regimes, the prioritization of an educated public, a scientist-materialist perception of the world, an animosity towards Islam, and the opinion that modernization was related to a shift in one's belief system.<sup>46</sup>

Abdullah Cevdet's ongoing effort to spread materialism made him an idol among many of the future materialists, especially after the Young Turk Revolution in 1908.<sup>47</sup> One of his numerous followers was the journalist and writer Baha Tevfik.<sup>48</sup> Like many scientist Ottoman intellectuals, he was educated at the Royal School for Administration from 1904 to 1907. He then published several works dealing with science and philosophy, and in 1910 opened a publishing house called *Scientific and Philosophical Renovation* devoted to the distribution of scientific materialism.<sup>49</sup> However, unlike the Ottoman intellectuals before him, Baha Tevfik did not seek to impose materialism upon an Islamic belief system.<sup>50</sup> His work mark a more straightforward *Vulgar materialism* that was prevalent among the Young Turk intellectuals after 1908. These young Turks, like the 'traditional' vulgar materialists, did not believe that religion had any place in modern Ottoman society and regarded it as backward.<sup>51</sup>

Baha Tevfik believed that philosophy was the science of the future, and sought to create a philosophy based on scientific findings that would educate the public. He believed that non-scientists should no longer be involved in philosophy at all.<sup>52</sup> This perspective is an obvious result of his intricate study of Büchner's work, which he greatly admired. As his predecessors had done before him, Baha Tevfik dedicated himself to the translation of various materialist works. He translated Büchner's *Kraft und Stoff* entirely, as Abdullhah Cevdet had only translated parts of it.<sup>53</sup> He regarded this work as the bible of materialism; its great value was strengthened through its elaborate attacks on religion. Baha Tevfik's early death at thirty in 1914 was a grave loss to

<sup>42</sup> Mardin, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought*, 177.

<sup>43</sup> Özdalga, *Late Ottoman Society*, 16.

<sup>44</sup> Kurzman, *Modernist Islam*, 172.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Mardin, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought*, 173.

<sup>47</sup> Özdalga, *Late Ottoman Society*, 55.

<sup>48</sup> Mardin, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought*, 142.

<sup>49</sup> Özdalga, *Late Ottoman Society*, 65.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

Ottoman materialist thought, which subsequently lost influence in World War I until its re-emergence under Atatürk's Turkish Republic.<sup>54</sup> In his short life he powerfully advanced *Vulgärmaterialismus* through numerous literary and satirical works which envisaged a society devoid of religion and superstition.<sup>55</sup>

The greatest flaw in the ideas shared by these materialists was their narrow-minded belief in the universal application of science to all dimensions – including human society. Their divine 'scientific truth' was hardly properly defined, yet was supposed to stand above all human rules and perceptions.<sup>56</sup> The impact of German popular materialism in Turkey becomes evident when it is contrasted to its reception in Germany. Vogt, Büchner and Moleschott were ridiculed as pseudo-philosophers and vulgar materialists by the Marxists. Yet in the Ottoman Empire, *Vulgärmaterialismus* was no longer considered vulgar and became the *weltanschauung* of the majority of Ottoman men of science, which they perceived as an idealization of their labour.<sup>57</sup> More importantly, the scientific movement carried the lure of Western material and intellectual progress through its promotion of a single scientific truth.<sup>58</sup>

*Vulgärmaterialismus* was thus seen as an explanation for the embarrassing Western scientific superiority over Ottoman society. Consequently, one of the major misinterpretations of the scientific *Weltanschauung* was that the Young Turks equated Westernization with progress. For example, many scientific Ottoman journals encouraged the people to dress like Europeans and to adopt their mannerisms. Meanwhile, they urged the people to give up on anachronistic traditions that were deemed to be "irreconcilable" with the modern reality of life. Traditional practices such as almsgiving and hospitality were criticized as impracticalities in the present world.<sup>59</sup> It is not a coincidence that two of the principal Ottoman materialists were also the leaders of the Ottoman westernization initiative. Abdullah Cevdet forwarded the adaptation of the ways of the West, since he believed the relationship between Europe and the Ottoman Empire to mirror one among the intellectuals and the ignorant.<sup>60</sup> Similarly, Baha Tevfik embraced Westernization as an ideal for the Ottoman people, he regarded traditional beliefs and customs such as hospitality as useless and suggested they "be thrown onto the trash heap of history."<sup>61</sup>

Between 1902 and 1908 the political beliefs of the Young Turks became more focused and pragmatic, although they still viewed science as essentiality. Their *Weltanschauung* between 1889 and 1902 had lacked a revolutionary praxis and was thus replaced with a more revolution-oriented realpolitik.<sup>62</sup> As the CUP progressed from a materialist student organization into an activist committee that strove to create a revolution in the multiethnic Ottoman Empire, the scientific worldview was eclipsed, even more so after the Young Turk Revolution in 1908.<sup>63</sup> It was then again revived when Mustafa Kemal came to power in 1922. In line with late Ottoman beliefs he implemented secular reforms, promoted the notion that science was the only truth, and, like the Young Turk intellectuals; equated westernization with progress. Additionally,

<sup>54</sup> Özdalga, *Late Ottoman Society*, 77.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>58</sup> Hanioglu, *Atatürk*, 57.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>60</sup> Özdalga, *Late Ottoman Society*, 80.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>62</sup> Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution*, 291.

<sup>63</sup> Ahmet T. Kuru, *Democracy, Islam, and Secularism in Turkey* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 39.



he advocated Turkish racial theories.<sup>64</sup>

As stated earlier, Mustafa Kemal was a product of the second generation of the Young Turks. Like Besir Fu'ad, he was educated at the Royal Military Academy; although it was not a center of Ottoman materialist activism, he soon learnt about the seeping influence of German materialist thought.<sup>65</sup> He was first exposed to scientific ideas and *Vulgärmaterialismus* through journals, pamphlets and Büchner's work *Kraft und Stoff*. Atatürk was particularly attracted to the idea that human thought had a material basis, which Büchner had "proven" through the presence of phosphorus in brain activity. While Mustafa Kemal briefly read over the major vulgar materialist works, he never produced scientific material himself. The most prominent lesson he adopted from the books was that science enabled progress, while religion functioned as a hindrance to development.<sup>66</sup> For Atatürk, as for the late Ottoman intellectuals before him, science was meant to guide all thinking, while religion was a manufactured phenomenon, fashioned by certain prophets in specific historical contexts. He perceived science to be the most essential and accurate guide in life, while seeking any counsel other than science equaled stupidity and ignorance.<sup>67</sup> Moreover, religion was seen to be a man-made phenomenon. For instance, Atatürk believed that Islam had emerged as a result of Muhammad's appearance, rather than a national development of the Arab people.<sup>68</sup> This perspective was likewise promoted in the Young Turk journal *Ictihad*, which, as mentioned earlier, under the editor Abdullah Cevdet, sought to promote Islam as a materialist philosophy that would enable the formation of a non-religious state in the future. Atatürk was a strong adherent of Cevdet's ideas, he even sought to appoint him as a parliamentary member in order to transform his scientific beliefs into reality.<sup>69</sup> He later appointed two major authors of the journal as deputies to the Turkish National Assembly.

Like the Ottoman intellectuals of his time, Atatürk was guilty of misinterpreting scientism by incorporating westernization as one of its key concepts.<sup>70</sup> The West was viewed as both a threat and a solution to the problems experienced by the late Ottoman Empire; many Young Turk intellectuals regarded the exclusive adaptation of science as the key to its progress, and therefore promoted westernization as a means and resolution to the "backwardness" of their society. Atatürk regarded Western civilization as the pinnacle of progress, yet he was also weary of Europe's ambitions in the Ottoman Empire. Though he remained suspicious, he nonetheless advocated an extensive adaptation of Western practices and culture.<sup>71</sup> Atatürk was able to institutionalize the notions of westernization held by the Young Turks before him. He agreed with the views held by Abdullah Cevdet, that any protest against these ambitions was futile, given the indisputable conclusion of the superiority of science. His admiration for things Western went so far that he advocated the adaptation of their customs and clothing. In 1925 he banned the wearing of the fez.<sup>72</sup> Atatürk argued that the hat should be worn instead as it

<sup>64</sup> Hanioglu, *Atatürk*, 57, 163.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>71</sup> Tareq Y. Ismael, *Government and Politics of the Contemporary Middle East: Continuity and Change* (London: Routledge, 2011), 84.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

was key to the civilized class, while the fez was an originally Greek head attire.<sup>73</sup> For him, opposing the dress code of the West represented the behaviour of someone who chose to live with superstitious, medieval beliefs, rather than joining the progressive thoughts of a society that had flown in the sky and, made vast scientific advances.<sup>74</sup> Atatürk implemented his westernization reforms with a radicalism that bypassed the expectations of many Ottoman intellectuals.<sup>75</sup> Instead of reforming the existing social structure and its practices, his policies introduced new practices while banning old ones. For instance, when he introduced the Roman alphabet, he completely banned the Arabic script. Moreover, when he introduced the Swiss Civil Code, he replaced the Ottoman Legal code, thus banning the *shariah* from the Turkish citizens' lives.<sup>76</sup>

Nevertheless, along with certain Ottoman materialists before him such as Abdullah Cevdet, Atatürk was aware that religion was deeply ingrained in the Turkish consciousness, and as such, he sought to reform Islam and use it as a tool to co-opt the masses. Religion was to take on a temporary role before it would be cast aside, as it was not part of the scientific worldview.<sup>77</sup> Initially, he used a more religious discourse as justification for his program to appeal to the public, thus engaging in an intricate balancing act to appease diverse political strands, until he had consolidated his position.<sup>78</sup> Eventually, Atatürk implemented harsh secular reforms, such as the abolishment of the Caliphate, the closing of pious foundations, religious schools, and Muslim shrines.<sup>79</sup> He also proceeded with caution with the emancipation of women. Although this goal was irrefutably on his agenda, he was prudent enough not to change deep-seated cultural norms, such as the veiling of females, although he in fact perceived this practice as backward.<sup>80</sup> He did, however, grant women the vote in 1926, and provided them with equal opportunity and rights through the implementation of the Swiss legal code, thereby furthering his Westernization reform.<sup>81</sup>

Moreover, Mustafa Kemal was deeply impressed by the theory of evolution. However, like Baha Tevfik and Abdullah Cevdet before him, he did not proliferate the evolutionary theory based on Darwin's writings, rather, he referred to Carl Vogt's and Ludwig Büchner's interpretations of it. Certain notions disseminated in the German materialist discourse, such as the belief that various human species descended from distinct ape species, or the perception of the eternity of matter, found resonance in Atatürk's advances, as in the Turkish history thesis.<sup>82</sup> His conception of the last phase of human development, however, differed substantially from the prior evolutionary theories.<sup>83</sup> Atatürk held that the real evolution of mankind occurred in Turkey in 9000 BCE Central Asia, the Turkish homeland. From here, the Turks had migrated to all continents, founded the Hittite and Sumerian civilizations, and helped the other "backward" ones, such as the Indians and the Chinese,

<sup>73</sup> Hanioglu, *Atatürk*, 207.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 56, 162.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>79</sup> Ismael, *Government and Politics of the Contemporary Middle East*, 84.

<sup>80</sup> Hanioglu, *Atatürk*, 209.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 210.

<sup>82</sup> Stefaan Blancke, *Creationism in Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 188-189.

<sup>83</sup> Hanioglu, *Atatürk*, 162.



develop.<sup>84</sup> Accordingly, descendents of modern-day Turks were seen as the harbingers of human civilizations, having brought fire, bread, clothing, and the domesticated life to other parts of the world.<sup>85</sup> Atatürk relied on anthropology to prove this thesis. He hired numerous researchers who supported their findings with those of vulgar materialist thinkers (i.e., Carl Vogt's racial theories). They applied materialist methodologies in line with Vogt's work to prove their theses: anthropologists measured Hittite and Seljuk skulls and compared them to Turkish, Jewish, and Greek specimens obtained from cemeteries, to affirm the superiority of the Turkish race.<sup>86</sup> Atatürk publicised his "science-based" ideas through journals, propaganda and school textbooks. Early Republican textbooks promoted his view of evolution to schoolchildren, who were taught that Turkey was the birth of civilization in 9000 BCE.<sup>87</sup> Moreover, starting in the 1920s, school children were taught that life was entirely controlled by the laws of chemistry and physics, leaving no room for unscientific religious beliefs.<sup>88</sup>

It is important to note that Mustafa was a direct product of his time, in that he was raised within a specific social setting that fostered material scientism. This presented one of the few ideological options available to a revolutionary leader at that time. Several of Atatürk's radical conceptions were widely held beliefs that were further strengthened after the Young Turk Revolution. As a matter of fact, several materialist Young Turks later credited Atatürk as having transformed their ideas into reality.<sup>89</sup> He was a pragmatist, and did not waste time dissecting philosophical theories. In this regard, he was perhaps the most authentic Vulgärmaterialist, denigrating philosophy and replacing it with science by incorporating it into every aspect of human society.<sup>90</sup>

The compelling impact of German scientist thinkers, and especially of *Vulgärmaterialismus*, on the late Ottoman Empire, and consequently the Turkish Republic, is irrefutable. Ottoman intellectuals, particularly Besir Fu'ad, Abdullah Cevdet, and Baha Tevfik took hold of these concepts and further simplified the German creed that combined materialism, scientism, and certain aspects of Darwinism into a composite of several, at times contradictory, ideas. These were established and dispersed throughout the late Ottoman period, until they were able to thrive under the ruthless policies of Atatürk. The cornerstone of these beliefs was the rejection of religion and its supplementation with science. However, Atatürk and the Young Turk intellectuals did not only adopt Vogt's and Buchner's numerous scientific theories, they also perceived Westernization to signify progress when compared to the "backward" condition of the Turkish state.<sup>91</sup> As such, Mustafa Kemal desperately sought to Westernize the nation by secularizing it, and introducing all things European – from mannerisms to dress code. Moreover, his study of the Turkish race, founded upon Vogt's racial theories, functioned additionally as a compensatory mechanism to overcome the backwardness of the Turkish Republic. Ironically, the vulgar materialists were ridiculed for their pseudo-science in Germany and experienced significantly more success in Turkey. Moreover, the Ottoman

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 164.

<sup>85</sup> Hanioglu, *Atatürk*, 165.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 170-171.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 162.

<sup>88</sup> Blancke, *Creationism in Europe*, 189.

<sup>89</sup> Hanioglu, *Atatürk*, 55.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 50, 52

intellectuals and Mustafa Kemal did not realize that their firm adherence to science as a panacea to all human problems actually replaced religion in their worldview, leading to a perceived worship of science among them. Despite the many progressive reforms undertaken by Ataturk one must wonder what shape Turkish society would have taken if certain central aspects of its culture and religion had not been denigrated and replaced with foreign beliefs, leading to a similar, if not even more "irrational" worldview.



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## 'The Island' that Caused a Sea to Change: Al Jazeera's Impact on the Egyptian Uprisings of 2011

By Shane Murphy

*The traditional narrative surrounding the Egyptian uprisings of 2011 was that of social media. Foreign policy experts, international observers, and the Egyptian government itself were shocked at the potency of the revolt, especially its ability to force the resignation of Hosni Mubarak. Experts attributed this movement to the growing power of 21<sup>st</sup> century new media, such as Twitter and Facebook, as grassroots organizing tools. This paper takes a different angle on the events of the revolt. Rather than focus on the well-documented role of social media, I argue that the real power to inspire the Egyptian people to revolt still lies with traditional media, specifically the news network Al Jazeera. Al Jazeera is one of the few objective, non-state-run news outlets with massive reach and influence. Throughout the paper, I examine these factors. First, I trace the history of state-run media in Egypt and how it has been used to influence public opinion. Then, I chronicle the rise of Al Jazeera and its penetration into the Egyptian market. Lastly, I outline what I believe to be the three primary reasons that support the idea that it was primarily Al Jazeera, not Facebook or Twitter, that incited the Egyptian citizens to revolt.*

On January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2011, Egypt began to collapse.

The revolt which had been fomenting in the hearts and minds of the populace for at least a decade came to its culminating point. A grassroots movement which took root in the largely untested waters of social media resulted in a crowd of 300,000 people gathering in Cairo's Tahrir Square, calling for nothing less than the resignation of much of the Egyptian government.<sup>1</sup> But the most radical part of the uprisings was their apparent success. Less than a month later, on February 11<sup>th</sup> President Hosni Mubarak and most of his senior cabinet officials resigned. The Egyptian uprisings of 2011 were a major victory that demonstrated the power of peaceful protest and grassroots organization and proved the viability of social media as a platform for inciting real-world change. Such is the conventional narrative.

This paper, however, seeks to explore the Egyptian uprisings from a different angle. Rather than focusing on the well-documented use of social media to organize protests, this piece will evaluate the impact of non-governmental controlled news media, specifically the network Al Jazeera, on the revolt. Al Jazeera—a television news network created in 1996, in Qatar, originally dedicated to reporting on Arabic news and current affairs—was uniquely positioned to impact the events of the Egyptian uprisings. This was mostly due to its large presence in Egypt, its independence from the Egyptian government, and its concurrent willingness to show the abuses of the Egyptian state. Over the following pages, I will explore these facets of the network and explain their impact on the Egyptian protests and subsequent successes of the

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<sup>1</sup> "Update on the Size of Protests in Cairo," Stratfor Global Intelligence, last modified February 1, 2011. Delivered via email November 15, 2013.

populist uprisings of 2011.

The central argument advanced in this paper is that Al Jazeera's reporting and dissemination of information during the Egyptian uprisings of 2011 significantly loosened the stranglehold on the spread of information that the Egyptian government historically had in the second half of the twentieth century. The essay will argue that Al Jazeera's role as a fairly objective news source which was willing to show the abuses of the Egyptian government served to force the Egyptian people to confront the harsh reality of their government's actions, and ultimately played a major role in inspiring the protests and grassroots rebellion of the Egyptian citizenry.

The following pages will begin by tracing the history of state-run media in Egypt, in concert with an examination of the Egyptian government's methods of using such media to control public opinion. The paper will then proceed with a brief history of Al Jazeera itself, specifically with regard to its role in past Middle Eastern affairs and crises. After that, the core of the paper will provide analysis on the role that Al Jazeera played in the Egyptian uprisings. I will highlight and analyze three factors that I believe best evidence Al Jazeera's role in the uprisings: the ubiquity and reach of the network itself, the attempts by the Egyptian government to stop its broadcasts, and the network's ability to force Egyptians to confront the harsh reality of the Mubarak regime. Finally, the paper will conclude with a summary of the arguments, as well as a brief statement about the crucial role media plays in democratic governance.

This paper relies on a variety of sources to make its arguments, from books and scholarly articles about the topic, to blog posts and news reports from Al Jazeera itself, to an interview with a scholar who lived through the uprisings in Egypt. The goal of this paper is to broaden the understanding about the pivotal role that non-governmental media play in serving as a check on corrupt governments, and an essential component of an informed citizenry.

### **Egyptian Media History: 1952-2002**

The uprisings of 2011 were not the first events in Egyptian history to be called a revolution. In 1952, believing the Egyptian monarchy at the time to be corrupt and beholden to the interests of the British, a group of army officers led by Muhammad Naguib and Gamal Abdel Nasser led a military *coup d'état* against the Egyptian monarchy. The group, known as the Free Officers Movement, not only forced King Farouk to abdicate the throne, but in fact abolished the constitutional monarchy of Egypt to form the Republic of Egypt. To the Egyptian people, it was the dawn of a new era—an end to the corrupt governments of old.

For the free press, however, the Revolution was a step back. Nasser, who became Egypt's new leader, took the radical step of banning all political parties. He also began to exercise his newfound power to tightly control Egypt's media outlets, "attempting to create a unified voice for his political movement."<sup>2</sup> These kinds of restrictions on press freedoms continued to exist all the way through the Mubarak regime: in their 2011-2012 index, Reporters without Borders ranked Egypt 166<sup>th</sup> out of 179 countries studied for freedom of the press.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Vivian Salamana, "Al-Jazeera's (R)Evolution?" in *Mediating the Arab Uprisings*, ed. Adel Iskandar and Bassam Haddad (Washington, D.C.: Tadween Publishing, 2012), 40.

<sup>3</sup> "2011-2012 Press Freedom Index," Reporters without Borders, accessed December 2, 2013, [http://en.rsf.org/press-freedom-index-2011-2012\\_1043.html](http://en.rsf.org/press-freedom-index-2011-2012_1043.html).

Nasser was also one of the first leaders in the Middle East to understand how the spread of information through media could be used to mould public opinion. In 1954, Cairo Radio began broadcasting *Voice of the Arabs*, a radio program through which Nasser spread his ideals about Arab identity and nationalism. Soon the program got its own station and was broadcasting eighteen hours a day. As Philip Seib notes, the station's message was "Gamal Abdel Nasser's Arabism—a revolutionary mix of socialism and anticolonialism that targeted conservative Arab governments."<sup>4</sup> Author Marc Lynch called the program "an instrument of a powerful state... Radio broadcasting transformed the potential for Arab political activism by bringing Arabist political speech (if not rational discourse) directly to the increasingly mobilized masses."<sup>5</sup> In essence, Nasser realized the potential of using new (at the time) media with a wider reach to spread his political ideals. The *Voice of the Arabs* quickly became "the most influential broadcast medium in the Middle East and North Africa."<sup>6</sup>

Ironically, despite Nasser's seeming mastery of using the media as propaganda, the idea for a government-run television station was King Farouk's; the first Egyptian experiment in broadcast television was conducted in 1951.<sup>7</sup> However, various crises of human affairs, including the 1952 Revolution and the Suez Crisis of 1956, pushed public television out of the forefront, and so it was not until 1960 that the first state-run television channel made it onto the air, broadcasting six hours daily. In 1970, the Egyptian government established the Arab Radio and Television Union to control all Egyptian state-run media. The government split the Union into four different sectors: television, radio, finance, and engineering. Each of these sectors had a chairman who reported to what would ultimately become the Egyptian Ministry of Information.

The Union's predecessor, Egyptian State Broadcasting, had been one of the founding members of the European Broadcasting Union (EBU). However, it had withdrawn its membership after the EBU admitted the Israel Broadcasting Service in 1958. In 1986, under President Hosni Mubarak, Egypt had a change of heart, and the EBU was readmitted the Arab Radio and Television Union. The name was changed to the Egyptian Radio and Television Union (ERTU) and has remained so as of 2013.

### The Agenda

Throughout the history of the ERTU, the Egyptian government has leveraged its control over the state-run media in order to push its own agenda, often leading to misinformation being disseminated throughout the populace.

One major example of this occurred beginning in 1997, when the Mubarak regime began an ambitious plan to reclaim the highly arid Toshka region of Egypt for agriculture and settlement. The government wanted to create a "new Nile Valley" by pumping water from Lake Nasser into the barren desert to irrigate the land. The state's hope was to relocate up to 20 percent of Egypt's citizens to this newly reclaimed land.<sup>8</sup> The project, however, failed. The cause

<sup>4</sup> Philip Seib, *The Al Jazeera Effect* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2008), 20.

<sup>5</sup> Marc Lynch, *Voices of the New Arab Public: Iraq, Al-Jazeera, and Middle East Politics Today* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 36.

<sup>6</sup> Kamel Labidi, "The Voice of the Arabs is Speechless at 50," *The Daily Star*, July 10, 2003, accessed November 30, 2013, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/Opinion/Commentary/2003/Jul-10/109675-the-voice-of-the-arabs-is-speechless-at-50.aspx#axzz2n9Nw8CNU>.

<sup>7</sup> "Media History: Television," Egyptian Radio and Television Union, accessed December 1, 2013, [http://www.egyptradio.tv/en/tv.html?work\\_id=283](http://www.egyptradio.tv/en/tv.html?work_id=283).

<sup>8</sup> Bradley Hope, "Egypt's new Nile Valley: grand plan gone bad," *The National*, April 22, 2012, accessed December 3, 2013, <http://www.thenational.ae/news/world/middle-east/egypts-new-nile-valley-grand-plan-gone-bad>.

of the failure is not entirely known due to the government's total secrecy around the project, but it is believed to be largely due to engineering miscalculations and ill-preparedness.<sup>9</sup> Regardless of the cause, the government has been extremely secretive, if not outright dishonest, about the logistics of the project. From not publishing engineering studies to vastly misrepresenting the cost of the project—the Egyptian government reports it as \$83 million U.S. dollars, while the U.S. State Department alleges \$87 *billion*<sup>10</sup>—the government has done its best to cover up the failure of the project, and state-run media has been nothing if not complicit.

Professor of Arabic Language Emad Rushdie of the University of Pennsylvania—who lived in Egypt for a significant majority of his life—recalls the Toshka incident quite clearly: “This project cost a lot of money, there was a lot of corruption in this project, and eventually this project failed! But the media was focusing on this project day and night, [saying] ‘The President is going to flourish the economy by establishing this project that will widen... the cultivated lands in Egypt, which will help farmers and youth, etc.’”<sup>11</sup> The state-run media in this case engaged in wholesale propaganda, dutifully pushing the message of the regime, even if that message ran counter to objective facts and evidence.

### A New Era

As previously stated, Egyptian state-run television has a monopoly on terrestrial broadcasts. In the past decade or so, however, private media companies have found an inroad into the country's media market through the relatively new technology of satellite broadcasting. Satellite broadcasting has become “the dominant platform in the country;” as of 2012, only 41% of households in Egypt watch analog, terrestrial television broadcasts.<sup>12</sup> Forty-one percent is still a significant number, but it is a rapidly dwindling one, and state-run media's market share continues to decline.

Satellite television is a relatively new phenomenon in Egypt, but even newer is the existence of private, non-state-run media outlets broadcasting over the airwaves. It was only in 2002 that the Egyptian Ministry of Information began licensing private satellite channels to broadcast,<sup>13</sup> and at first it was to just two channels, both of which the government had a financial stake in.<sup>14</sup> This is the environment into which Al Jazeera entered.

Al Jazeera—“The Island” in Arabic—was founded and began broadcasting in 1996 as a news network partially funded by the Qatari government. Just a little over two years later, the channel began broadcasting twenty four hours a day, and quickly established itself as the premier broadcaster in the Middle East.

The channel gained attention from the West during the infamous manhunt for Osama bin Laden after the attacks of September 11, 2001 in the United States. When bin Laden wanted to release videos to the public, often to taunt

<sup>9</sup> Andre Fecteau, “On Toshka New Valley's mega-failure,” *Egypt Independent*, June 26, 2012, accessed December 3, 2013, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/toshka-new-valleys-mega-failure>.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Rushdie Ahmed, Emad El-Din. Interview by Shane Murphy. Tape Recording. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, December 11, 2013.

<sup>12</sup> “Arab Media Outlook 2011-2015,” Dubai Press Club, 2012, <http://www.arabmediaforum.ae/userfiles/EnglishAMO.pdf>. 141.

<sup>13</sup> “Television Wars,” Pomegranate Blog, *The Economist*, December 17, 2012, accessed December 6, 2013, <http://www.economist.com/blogs/pomegranate/2012/12/media-egypt>.

<sup>14</sup> “Arab Media Outlook 2011-2015,” 141



the American government, they were generally released first to Al Jazeera. The network's willingness to air the videos became the subject of harsh criticism, with many in the U.S. accusing the channel of giving a platform to terrorists.

Nevertheless, the channel continued to grow in popularity in the Middle East. In 2005, a study conducted in Jordan, Morocco, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates revealed that 45 percent of the respondents claimed to watch Al Jazeera—this was markedly higher than any of its competitors, public or private.<sup>15</sup> It was also gaining popularity in Egypt. Al Jazeera had quickly become the most prominent non-state-controlled channel in the region; it developed a reputation for tough but fair reporting, and its accessibility via satellite television gave it a wide reach among the Egyptian populace. In 2011, that reach was about to be tested.

At this point, the paper now turns to the core of the argument it is advancing: that Al Jazeera played a pivotal role—a role greater even than social media, which has dominated the most common narratives about the uprisings—in the Egyptian revolt of 2011. This argument rests on three key principles. First is the fact that social media's reach, while rapidly increasing, was no match for the penetration of traditional media outlets such as television among the Egyptian people in 2011. Second, the attempts by the Egyptian government to jam Al Jazeera's signal, revoke its broadcasting license, and arrest its journalists demonstrated that the Mubarak regime knew the scope of the network's influence; they would not have attacked it if they did not consider it an imperative to take the network down. Lastly, this paper will argue that the channel's willingness to show on television the abuses of the Egyptian government forced the Egyptian people to acknowledge their cognitive dissonance with regards to the regime.

### A Wider Reach

Professor Rushdie actually scoffed when I asked him the question: Which had a bigger impact on the uprisings of 2011, Al Jazeera or social media? “Al Jazeera, of course! It encouraged all of the Egyptian people! The revolution started with... a few protests, and small ones. The protests increased because of the role of Al Jazeera and people watching Al Jazeera. They hear the word, and they hear what is really happening. And everybody was encouraged to go out... and the number of people increased and increased. The people I talked to said that had it not been for Al Jazeera, the Revolution would not have succeeded.”<sup>16</sup>

Professor Rushdie makes a compelling case, and one that is backed by significant evidence. Demonstrators in Tahrir Square, the apex of the uprisings, often played up the role of social media in organizing the mass protests against the Egyptian government. Yet while no one doubts the power of Facebook and Twitter as an *organizational* tool, they simply did not have the reach that news networks like Al Jazeera did in terms of spreading the word about the protests.

Egyptians watch a lot of television. In 2012, only one half of one percent of Egyptians reported watching no TV on a daily basis,<sup>17</sup> and the majority reported watching over three hours a day.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, the most popular

<sup>15</sup> Seib, *The Al Jazeera Effect*, 25.

<sup>16</sup> Rushdie, Interview.

<sup>17</sup> “Arab Media Outlook 2011-2015,” 142.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

genre of television for Egyptians was traditional news.<sup>19</sup> Since state-run news has been declining in popularity, much of the gains have gone directly to Al Jazeera and its ilk, creating a situation where the channel has wide influence among the Egyptian public. Contrast this high rate of engagement with the prevalence of the internet and social media, and one begins to question how much impact the latter could have on the general populace. In 2010, only 30.2 percent of Egyptians were using the internet.<sup>20</sup> The statistics for social media are even lower: of roughly eighty million people who lived in Egypt in 2010, just 4.6 million were on Facebook.<sup>21</sup>

Consequently, though it was on social media that the protests were organized, it was because of traditional, non-state-run media that they succeeded. Al Jazeera's live coverage of the protests in Tahrir Square granted the protesters an infinitely wider audience than they could have reached solely through social media and the internet. As Professor Rushdie described it, "I talked to people who participated in these protests. They told me that as they were walking along, people watching the protests in the coffee shops on Al Jazeera would leave the cafes and walk with the protesters."<sup>22</sup> As Douglas Kellner writes, "the often saturation of coverage on... Al Jazeera... help[ed] in turn to incite people to pour into the street to take part in the momentous upheaval."<sup>23</sup>

The protests may have been organized on Facebook, but traditional media carried them into the mainstream, both in Egypt and internationally. As Habibul Khondker writes, "Certainly, social network sites and the Internet were useful tools, but conventional media played a crucial role in presenting the uprisings to the larger global community who in turn supported the transformations."<sup>24</sup> It was because of continuing coverage of the protests by outlets such as Al Jazeera that the actions of the few who were on the internet were legitimized; without the coverage, it is unlikely the movement would have caught fire the way it did.

It is almost a truism that there is strength in numbers, yet nowhere is the phrase more apt than when relating to protests. Standing by oneself, or with a small group of people, against a powerful regime which has run Egypt for thirty years would be a daunting and perhaps foolhardy task. What Al Jazeera did was prove that there were others who would stand with the protesters. When people saw massive crowds on television, gathering in public places and calling for nothing less than the resignation of the most powerful man in the country, they realized that they were not alone. The crowds swelled and the protests became populist uprisings.

While the state media was downplaying the significance of the crowds, calling them "rebels... a bunch of thugs and criminals,"<sup>25</sup> Al Jazeera gave the marginalized a voice—and that voice spoke so clearly that just over two weeks after the protests at Tahrir Square began, Hosni Mubarak was gone.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 142.

<sup>20</sup> Gilbert Achcar, *The People Want: A Radical Exploration of the Egyptian Uprisings* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 132.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 132.

<sup>22</sup> Rushdie, Interview.

<sup>23</sup> Douglas Kellner, *Media Spectacle and Insurrection 2011: From the Arab Uprisings to Occupy Everywhere* (New York City: Bloomsbury, 2012), 45.

<sup>24</sup> Habibul Haque Khondker, "Role of the New Media in the Arab Spring," *Globalizations* 8:5 (2011): 677.

<sup>25</sup> Rushdie, Interview.



## Egypt's Last Resort

The second argument in favor of the influence of Al Jazeera is predicated upon the ferocity with which the Egyptian government tried to take the channel down. Basic logic dictates that to go to the lengths to which Egypt went in order to try to stop Al Jazeera from broadcasting, they must have been deathly afraid of the network's influence over the people. The government's actions in this case make clear that Al Jazeera was a powerful force in the uprisings.

In the earliest days of the protests, the Egyptian government instituted a mobile phone and internet blackout to try to prevent people from organizing and communicating; their fear of this mobilization proved to be far from unfounded. The story less often told, however, is that the government engaged in full-scale harassment of Al Jazeera's journalists to prevent them from broadcasting and reporting on the growing protest movement in the country.

From the beginning of the uprisings, state media and Egyptian governing officials showed direct and open hostility to Al Jazeera, "labeling the... network an enemy of the state and a conduit for foreign conspiracies to destabilize Egypt," according to Ashraf Khalil.<sup>26</sup> Al Jazeera's journalists spent the uprisings living in fear, unable to identify themselves to anyone but the protesters for fear of being sold out to the Egyptian government. On January 30, Ministry of Information officials raided the Al Jazeera offices; they took the journalists' press cards and ordered them to stop broadcasting. Terrified but determined, employees fled the office and transferred their entire operation to a nearby hotel.<sup>27</sup>

Al Jazeera was also able to continue to broadcast information because of another uniquely 21<sup>st</sup> century piece of technology: the portable satellite camera phone. By carrying extensive journalistic equipment—cameras, tape recorders, broadcasting equipment—Al Jazeera contributors would have easily been ferreted out by the Egyptian authorities. So the agents went undercover. Instead of expensive, high quality cameras, they sent choppy cell phone video and grainy pictures back to their office; rather than using a microphone and broadcasting equipment, they recorded themselves on their phones and filed anonymous reports from undisclosed locations. Even the Bureau Chief in Cairo had to report anonymously: he took a camerawoman with him into Tahrir Square and filmed all of his reports as an unnamed correspondent in an undisclosed location, broadcasting from a portable satellite phone.<sup>28</sup>

As discussed earlier, Egypt is generally a hostile place for freedom of the press. But the lengths to which the government went in trying to shut Al Jazeera down demonstrated just how afraid the regime was of this network, and showed the influence Al Jazeera had over the Egyptian populace. Under no logical scenario would the Egyptian government have made enemies with a large, multinational news and media conglomerate that has the reach and influence to shape public opinion across the Middle East and the world, unless they knew that the alternative—Al Jazeera continuing to report on the uprisings—could be even more disastrous. This again shows the influence of Al Jazeera, and the extent to which it enabled the events of the Egyptian revolt in 2011.

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<sup>26</sup> Ashraf Khalil, *Liberation Square: Inside the Egyptian Revolution and the Rebirth of a Nation* (New York City: St. Martin's Press, 2011), 251.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 252.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

## Showing Reality

The third and final reason Al Jazeera had such a significant impact on the Egyptian uprisings was that the network actually showed what was going on. Unlike state media, Al Jazeera was unafraid to broadcast uncensored images of police brutality and government abuse. When the Egyptian populace saw these images on their television screens, they realized they could not simply ignore the abuses of their government or pretend that they were not happening. This subsequently encouraged involvement in the protests and demonstrations, and ultimately led to the resignation of much of the Egyptian government.

I asked Professor Rushdie whether the Egyptian people knew that their government was mistreating them, and his response was immediate and forceful:

Of course! For the last ten years, people realized that there is no success, no prosperity. Poverty was increasing; all the wealth of the state was in the hands of a few people. Egypt was [ostensibly] achieving economic success, but this was really controlled only by Mubarak and his men. The Egyptian economy indicators were improving internationally according to the International Bank and other international monetary organizations. But the normal Egyptian person did not feel that. And every time I go to Egypt every summer, I see the situation getting worse. I see luxury hotels, luxury resorts... built only for a few people—mainly tourists and that's it. The people were aware.<sup>29</sup>

Rushdie contends that these factors are what ultimately led to the revolt, and that certainly seems to be the case. But the Egyptian people were not just being exploited economically by their government; their rights were being violated as well. There are well-documented reports of torture, of imprisonment under false pretenses (or no pretenses), and brutal beatings at the hands of police officers.<sup>30</sup> But if the Egyptian people knew about this, the question becomes, why did they display such apathy for so long?

The answer, this paper suggests, is because of the classic “not me” problem. Egyptians could hear about or even witness these things, but since they were not the ones being abused, they could pretend it was not happening. Why risk standing up to a powerful regime that is not afraid to punish—and punish harshly—its enemies, if you are not the one personally suffering? So Egyptians decided to simply pretend that there was nothing wrong, for fear of the alternative.

Al Jazeera changed that, however. Unlike state-run media, they displayed the uncensored versions of the protests and of the actions of the Egyptian government officials. This was wholly unsurprising; after all, the network's calling card was originally that it had been willing to show “many of the gritty images of corpses and other bloody scenes that Western networks avoid[ed], so as not to offend or lose viewers.”<sup>31</sup> In fact, Vivian Salama calls the network “the regional pioneer of this new generation of media where topics, once

<sup>29</sup> Rushdie, Interview.

<sup>30</sup> Marjorie Oister, “Mubarak Regime Abuses Go Unpunished,” *Associated Press*, published on *The Huffington Post*, June 3, 2012, accessed December 4, 2013, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/06/04/mubarak-regime-abuses-go\\_n\\_1567202.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/06/04/mubarak-regime-abuses-go_n_1567202.html).

<sup>31</sup> Salama, “Al-Jazeera's (R)Evolution,” 40.

exclusive to hushed coffee shop banter, were now being openly exposed on television for the Arabic-speaking world to see or hear.”<sup>32</sup> That is as good a summation as any of what Al Jazeera did during the Egyptian uprisings: they took what everyone knew was going on, and splattered it across all the television screens of a multinational news network to make it unavoidable. No longer could people ignore what their government was doing: the images became ever-present, in homes and coffee shops around the country. Al Jazeera forced Egyptians to acknowledge what they already knew.

On February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2011, a group of undercover Al Jazeera correspondents noticed an impending fight between revolutionaries and pro-Mubarak forces at Railroad Station Square. They camped out on top of an apartment building and broadcast the entire thing live. Far outnumbered, the Egyptian revolutionaries were quickly and harshly put down by the Mubarak forces.<sup>33</sup> Al Jazeera’s ability to broadcast the entire thing, however, undercut the state-run media’s narrative and ensured that the Egyptian people were faced with the reality of their government’s actions.

Just hours later, on February 2<sup>nd</sup> gunfire broke out in Tahrir Square as pro and anti-Mubarak forces clashed violently. Al Jazeera was on the scene, broadcasting the event and displaying pictures being taken in real time as the Square was erupting into chaos. The network even reported that it was pro-Mubarak forces who were shooting the weapons.<sup>34</sup> The event became a global phenomenon within a week, and further galvanized support for the anti-Mubarak crowd.

These are just two examples of Al Jazeera’s uncensored coverage during the uprisings. The network’s willingness to defy Egypt’s attempts to censor it, and broadcast the atrocities being committed by the Mubarak regime, drastically increased popular support for the movement and forced the citizens of Egypt to acknowledge what was happening in their own country.

## Conclusion

Media influences public opinion. This is undoubtedly true; it is a concept taught in every media studies, sociology, and political science class. Leaders like Gamal Abdel Nasser know this; it is how they were able to so effectively marshal public opinion and popular support behind them. If a leader can control the flow of information in his or her country, he or she can manipulate that information to suit his or her needs.

The Egyptian uprisings are a case study of what happens when a leader loses control. They demonstrated what happened when private media like Al Jazeera came in and pushed an agenda contrary to that of President Mubarak. Not coincidentally, a month after Al Jazeera began reporting the uprisings, Mubarak was forced to resign.

The dominant narrative surrounding these uprisings highlights the impact of social media in organizing and gaining support for the revolutionaries. This paper, though, has argued that while there was undoubtedly a role for social media to play, it was simply not as influential as traditional, non-state-run media, such as Al Jazeera. The three main pieces of evidence cited—penetration rates of traditional television versus the internet, the Egyptian

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>33</sup> Khalil, *Liberation Square*, 253-255.

<sup>34</sup> “Battle of Tahrir Square,” *Al Jazeera*, February 3, 2011, accessed December 4, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/02/20112391254105223.html>.

government's desperation to take Al Jazeera off the air, and the network's willingness to force the Egyptian people to confront the actions of their government—all demonstrate how a media network as influential as “The Island” can tap into the volatile populist fervor and mold it into a cohesive revolt.

What the Egyptian uprisings made clear is that there is a “crucial role” for non-state-run media to play in democratic governance.<sup>35</sup> A free press is a necessary check on any government; a press which is subservient to the propaganda of the state is self-defeating, for if such media does not seek to inform honestly, it has served no useful purpose in societal existence. In the course of their reporting on the uprisings of 2011, Al Jazeera proved that it *does* have a necessary role to fill, and that if such a role goes unfilled, revolution cannot happen.



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<sup>35</sup> Khondker, “Role of the New Media,” 676.

# History, Identity, and the Gulf Arab States

By Shahryar Pasandideh

*As the Arab states of the Gulf are investing heavily in the cultivation of national identities, these historically understudied societies have been featured in national and regional histories that support notions of a 'common' historical experience and a 'Gulf identity.' This paper contends that both the aforementioned sources are problematic in that they ignore the region's varied historical experience and diversity.*

Despite their immense wealth, the Arab states of the Persian/Arabian Gulf are curiously understudied. Yet, after much delay and as a consequence of generous patronage from the governments of the region, they are leaving the 'footnotes' of histories. National histories of the region have been written and some have tried to weave these narratives together, formulating a notion of 'Gulf history.'<sup>1</sup> The rationale for such works is that the region appears relatively homogenous at distance with a 'shared history' dating back, at the very least, to the era of British hegemony. Others, such as Miriam Cooke in her book *Tribal Modern*, have gone a step further and group the countries of the region together in order to study issues of identity.<sup>2</sup> This essay seeks to engage in conversation with these two approaches. It argues that whilst notions of a 'common' Gulf historical experience can be helpful, it must be qualified and varied experiences emphasized. With respect of the notion of a 'Gulf identity,' it argues that the varied historical experiences, current socio-political and socio-economic issues, and the varying approaches to cultural cultivation severely limit the utility of the notion.

A note on sources: The material used for this essay comes from a number of different academic disciplines. There exists a miniscule number of works that deal with the entire region. Consequently, this paper has selectively and, hopefully, judiciously extrapolated certain themes from certain locales to others that share similar features. Research included some material on Saudi Arabia for comparative purposes and also delved into the relatively substantial literature on Oman. However, given space constraints, the difficulty of fitting Oman into the 'common' Gulf historical experience, and its distinct heterogeneity, it is left out of this paper.

Despite the relatively small size of the Gulf region, there is great heterogeneity not only in the inhabitants' culture and socio-economic existence, but also with respect to their historical experiences. As Bristol-Rhys argues, the fact that oil was discovered during the era of British hegemon has had a stifling

<sup>1</sup> One work that stands out is David Commins' 2012 *The Gulf States: A Modern History*. Despite the title, the book begins with Ancient Mesopotamia. The Chapter "The Era of British Supremacy, 1820-1920" begins on page 76 on a 318 page book. It should be noted that the statement should not be construed as a critique of Commins' book as the author does justice to the narrative by emphasizing differences. Nevertheless, his focus on the collection of countries as a particular region of study is indicative of a greater trend.

<sup>2</sup> As far as this author is aware, Miriam Cooke's 2014 *Tribal Modern: Branding New Nations on the Arab Gulf* is the only English-language scholarly book to discuss matters of identity in the Gulf region. This is not to say other material does not exist. Rather, as this essay's secondary sources will demonstrate, extant material exists mainly in chapters in edited volumes, a handful of journal articles, and books dealing with related topics or subtopics. Such factoids become more curious when realized that Cooke's essentially compiles a monograph based on these very secondary sources with a minor addition of field research and interviews.

effect on what she argues might have been a mostly critical assessment.<sup>3</sup> Even so, the impact of British imperialism is varied by scope and duration. As such, the history of British rule is worth recounting.

The Qawasim of the north-eastern United Arab Emirates (UAE), a mountainous coastal area, were defeated in 1809 when the British raided Ras al-Khaimah and destroyed much of their fleet. This action so incensed the Qawasim that they rallied neighbouring sheikhs all the way to Bahrain to their cause. This indigenous alliance was defeated in 1820, after the British besieged Ras al-Khaimah and destroyed the entirety of the Qawasim fleet. As a result, the British imposed the General Treaty of Peace.<sup>4</sup> After this, these polities became collectively known as the Trucial States. Curiously, this common endeavour appears not to receive much emphasis in either the popular or official narratives, perhaps because it ended in defeat, however valiant. The British brought relative peace to the coast and by 1835, many of the Trucial Sheikhs agreed to a truce amongst themselves under British tutelage leading to the 1853 perpetual Maritime Truce.<sup>5</sup> Yet, Kuwait, Bahrain, and Qatar do not fit into this narrative as they developed treaty relations with the British much later. Bahrain bound itself to the British agreement with the Trucial States in 1892, and Kuwait and Qatar signed up in 1899 and 1916, respectively.<sup>6</sup>

British hegemony manifested itself differently throughout the region but, despite the handful of British agents present at any time, the British played an important role in the region's development.<sup>7</sup> Everywhere they helped entrench existing ruling families, thereby slowly shifting power from merchant elite to the ruling families.<sup>8</sup> Rosemarie Zahlan argues that this aspect of British hegemony, when coupled with the revenues from British subsidies and oil royalties, institutionalised the position of the ruler and perpetuated the existence of the polities.<sup>9</sup> The British perpetuated the political order by maintaining strictly bilateral relations with the Gulf polities and by distinguishing them through by requiring their vessels to fly 'national' maritime flags.<sup>10</sup> The British also isolated the region by restricting travel to the Gulf, resulting in inward-looking and parochial states.<sup>11</sup> This only changed with the advent of oil companies that brought in large numbers of Europeans and Arabs from Egypt and the Levant.<sup>12</sup>

Despite the common experience under the British, there are some important differences. In the UAE, for example, British military victory and hegemony shifted the balance of power from the seafaring Qawasim to the 'continental' Bani Yas of Abu Dhabi and Dubai.<sup>13</sup> A similar tale can only be told about Oman. Whilst British presence in the Gulf was minimal on the ground – but not at sea – and quite passive, the British played a direct and active role in Bahrain, a polity in which they directly shaped the development of politics by actively intervening to uphold the monarchy in the 1920s, something unheard of elsewhere in the Gulf. Moreover, Britain's visible naval and political presence

<sup>3</sup> Jane Bristol-Rhys, *Emirati Women: Generations of Change* (London, UK: Jane Bristol-Rhys, 2010), 46.

<sup>4</sup> Rosemarie Said Zahlan, *The Making of the Modern Gulf States* (London, UK: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 7.

<sup>5</sup> Bristol-Rhys, *Emirati Women*, 8.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>7</sup> For example, the British agents, the Political Residents, numbered less than ten until the 1940s and, for much of the British era, they were based in Bushehr, Iran.

<sup>8</sup> Bristol-Rhys, *Emirati Women*, 20.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>10</sup> Zahlan, *The Making of the Modern Gulf States*, 15.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.



in Bahrain fostered a nationalist movement in the mid-1930s, and the early extraction of oil led to a labour movement that resulted in two major uprisings against the political order. The other Gulf states do not share a similar labour movement and only experienced such anti-colonial nationalism much later as they began extracting oil later on.

Oil companies helped perpetuate the British order, but were also instruments of change in many ways. The advent of oil made the delineation of borders an issue for the first time, helping foster national identities and loyalties in the process.<sup>14</sup> The British had not previously given consideration to land borders because they were only concerned with the littoral.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, the advent of oil companies and the associated arrival of other Arabs from outside the Peninsula brought new ideas, such as pan-Arab nationalism.<sup>16</sup> Yet, it should be noted that ‘nationalist’ movements existed in areas of the Gulf prior to oil, such in as in Kuwait and Dubai in the 1930s, where the merchant elite sought more power from the ruling family.<sup>17</sup>

The establishment of ‘modern states’ made problematic the heterogeneity of the Gulf’s populations. It caused immense problems to the Bedouin of Arabia for they had to choose between nationalities that frequently divided tribes and barred them from their traditional pastures.<sup>18</sup> It also politicized the existence of ethnic Iranians and Indians, the ‘*ajam*, Arabs from Iran, and *hawlas*, Gulf Arabs who re-migrated to the Gulf from Iran.<sup>19</sup> Additionally, it politicized the status of the transnational merchant families who frequently relocated based on economic realities.<sup>20</sup> These changes are best illustrated in Kuwait, where a potent political dichotomy between the nomadic Bedouin, the Badu, and the settled peoples, the Hadhar, has developed and continues to this day.

Kuwait was founded in the 18<sup>th</sup> century by Badu escaping drought and famine.<sup>21</sup> These Badu settled and became the Hadhar. They engaged in fishing, trading, and pearl diving and developed a distinct non-tribal identity based on shared experience in the pre-oil years.<sup>22</sup> In fact, the term Hadhar refers to Kuwaitis whose ancestors were in Kuwait before oil was first extracted. Since then, all Badu, even those living settled lives today, are grouped separately even though they hail from the same tribes as the Hadhar.<sup>23</sup> The shared experience of the Hadhar is exemplified in that they call themselves the *ahl al-sur*, the people of the wall that protected Kuwait from nomadic predation.<sup>24</sup> The dichotomy takes on increased importance given the national myth of the Battle of Jahra in 1920, when Wahhabi invaders were repelled by the ‘original’ Kuwaitis.<sup>25</sup> The battle was formative in Kuwaiti history as the population rallied around the monarchy at the behest of the merchant elite who demanded political power.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>17</sup> Neil Patrick, *Nationalism in the Gulf* (London, UK: London School of Economics, 2009), 13.

<sup>18</sup> Miriam Cooke, *Tribal Modern: Building New Nations in the Arab Gulf* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2014), 38; Some, such as the Al Murrâh, continue to face problems that emerged from the creation of modern states to this day. The Al Murrâh in Qatar are part of the *bedoon*, the stateless Bedouin because they were reluctant to commit themselves to Qatar, having pastures and kin in Saudi Arabia.

<sup>19</sup> Cooke, *Tribal Modern*, 60-61.

<sup>20</sup> Nora Colton, *Social Stratification in the Gulf Cooperation Council States* (London, UK: London School of Economics, 2011), 26.

<sup>21</sup> Anh Nga Longva, “Nationalism in Pre-Modern Guise: The Discourse on Hadhar and Badu in Kuwait” *International Journal Middle East Studies* 38 (2006), 171.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 172.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 176.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Patrick, *Nationalism in the Gulf*, 23.

While the Hadhar-Badu dichotomy in Kuwait exemplifies the tensions of state formation, it is particular to Kuwait with no similar process happening elsewhere in the Gulf. Yet, this experience fostered the emergence of Kuwait national identity, one which manifested itself in political debates as early as the 1950s.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, the experience stands testament to the role of the merchant elite in Kuwait, one which continued to agitate for political power, leading to the 1938 Majlis Movement, a development not seen elsewhere in the Gulf until recent years. Whilst Dubai had a notable merchant class, it was effectively non-existent in Abu Dhabi and Qatar. Of great import, this dichotomy does not exist in the same way elsewhere in the Gulf, even though there is tension over the nature of cultural patrimony.

A similarly particular but illustrative tale is that of the Arabic dialects of Bahrain. Historically, the Gulf has witnessed continuous population movements. As such, it is difficult to ascertain who the true indigenous peoples are, even though most tribes claim descent from Najdi or Yemeni tribes. Yet, for Bahrain, historical records from as early as the 13<sup>th</sup> century talk about the indigenous Shi'i Baharna. Clive Holes notes that as recently as forty years ago, the dialects of the Baharna and that of Bahraini Sunnis, the later grouping primarily composed of Bedouin tribesmen allied to the ruling family that conquered Bahrain, were different in pronunciation, word formation, grammar, and vocabulary.<sup>27</sup> This social chasm reflected the 'self-imposed' segregation of Bahraini society over centuries.<sup>28</sup> A similar split existed in northern Oman between the farmers of the mountainous interior and the Bedouin of the desert. Notably, the mountain dialects in Oman are similar to that of the farmers of Bahrain.<sup>29</sup> Given the similarity between northern Oman and the mountainous part of northeastern UAE, a similar pattern likely exists there as well. Across this expanse, the terminology of the settled peoples is rich in farming and contains words and expressions of non-Arabic origin, including Akkadian. The settled Bedouin's Arabic includes a rich vocabulary relating to pearling and financing, of which the indigenous settled peoples were largely ignorant.<sup>30</sup> Even so, this linguistic split is receding, and various dialects are morphing into a homogenised form of 'Gulf Arabic' not identifiable with any particular locale.<sup>31</sup>

There exists, and has always existed, immense diversity across the Gulf region. Of greater salience than real or presumed common origin, however, are different historical modes of life that determine what traditions are incorporated in the national narrative. Additionally, the historical experience across the region in recent centuries exhibits sufficient variance to prevent the utilization of common themes, such as British imperialism, in a common historical narrative. All of this, of course, does not even mention the contemporary expatriate majorities of the Gulf States who have their own historical experiences and modes of life. Different experiences are not the only part of history that undermines notions of a common Gulf history. Historical memory appears to be selective as a result of both 'top-down' and 'bottom-up factors,' some of which will be discussed in more detail in the next section on state efforts at identity cultivation.

<sup>26</sup> Bristol-Rhys, *Emirati Women*, 35.

<sup>27</sup> Clive D. Holes, "Language and Identity in the Arabian Gulf," *Journal of Arabian Studies* 1, no. 2 (2011), 131-132.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.



The ‘top-down’ manifestation of selective historical memory can be illustrated by the narrative promoted at Qatar’s national museum. It begins by announcing that Qatar’s history begins in the Stone Age, jumps to Herodotus’ mention of the town of Katara, followed by a leap to the 19<sup>th</sup> century British scholar-explorer William Palgrave before it again leaps to the ‘modern’ era of recent decades.<sup>32</sup> Yet, this ‘top-down’ approach can be problematic. Writing on the UAE, Jane Bristol-Rhys notes that few Emiratis are aware that the archaeological record indicates that the eastern part of the Arabian Peninsula has been home to humans for at least 5000 years.<sup>33</sup> In the case of the UAE, Bristol-Rhys argues that this very ancient past is conceived of as *jahiliyya* (the Islamic notion of the ‘age of ignorance’) and dismissed as not just remote and meaningless, but also dangerous.<sup>34</sup> With respect to the more recent British presence, Bristol-Rhys notes that many younger Emiratis are unaware of the British naval presence in the Gulf and, as a result, they only speak about the British finding oil.<sup>35</sup> A ‘bottom-up’ factor leading to the selective historical memory is likely the result of what Bristol-Rhys has noted about the UAE: “While [Gulf Arabs] want to keep the memory of their history, keep traditions alive, most work hard to distance themselves from the poverty and the harshness” of the past (*ayam al-faqr* – the days of poverty).<sup>36</sup> Moreover, the region’s historical narrative is essentially British in terms of sources if not narrative as well, the British having been the only people to extensively keep records on the region’s affairs until oil increased their importance.<sup>37</sup>

In her study on Emirati historical narratives, Bristol-Rhys argues that for many of her Emirati students, history begins with Sheikh Zayed, confederation, and oil.<sup>38</sup> She identifies four historical narratives. The first, a Qawasim centered narrative focuses on British imperialist and the defeat of the Qawasim. It emphasises the Qawasim’s consequent decline into poverty and the transfer of power from the seafaring Qawasim to the ‘continental’ Bani Yas of Abu Dhabi and Dubai. The second, the ‘British are our friends’ narrative, one commonly heard in Abu Dhabi, conflates the discovery of oil, Sheikh Zayed II becoming ruler, confederation, and Zayed II’s position of president. This narrative contends that the British were instrumental in finding oil and safeguarding those deposits from regional powers until Zayed II led the country to its present glory. The third, ‘the freedom fighters’ narrative, has gained prominence since the death of Zayed II in 2004. In this narrative, the rulers were freedom fighters who finally succeeding in wresting political power from the British in 1971. It focuses on Zayed II and his Bani-Yas kinsman, Sheikh Rashid of Dubai. Notably, the narrative disregards the fact that Zayed offered to subsidize Britain’s continued military presence in the Gulf post-1971. The ‘Trucial States Council’ narrative contends that the British brought the individual emirates together, as they did with the founding of the Trucial States Council in 1950, leading to Zayed II’s ‘Solomon-like judgement, generosity and patient diplomacy’ that led to confederation. The last narrative, the ‘Building our Past’ narrative, has a historical depth beginning in 1971. This is the popular narrative amongst the youth and elevates Zayed and Rashid, the ‘founding fathers’ to

<sup>32</sup> Cooke, *Tribal Modern*, 119.

<sup>33</sup> Bristol-Rhys, *Emirati Women*, 119.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 114-115.

<sup>37</sup> Jane Bristol-Rhys, “Emirati Historical Narratives” *History and Anthropology* 20, no. 2 (2009), 110.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

extraordinary status. Anything prior to 1971 is too distant and irrelevant.<sup>39</sup>

Given the different historical experiences and heterogeneity throughout the region and within the modern states, it is not surprising that the Gulf states are active in the cultivation of identity. A key aspect of this, one Cooke's book devotes much attention to, is the preservation of heritage and the establishment of museums. Indeed, Sulayman Khalaf argues that investment in popular heritage in the Gulf should be viewed as an aspect of nation building.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, the state's role in heritage promotes the image of their ruling families' role as guardians of cultural identity.<sup>41</sup>

In the UAE, senior members of the ruling families sponsored the formation of clubs and agencies to promote the country's heritage in the 1980s.<sup>42</sup> In the 1990s, more specialized centres and endeavours were launched that began publishing book series and pamphlets, began to forge links with overseas universities and institutions, and archived written and oral histories.<sup>43</sup> Since then, museums and cultural centres have mushroomed around the Gulf, with more under construction. Most of these focus on the nation itself, seeking to 'nationalize' certain activities such as pearling, sailing dhows, camel racing and breeding and falconry. As Cooke puts it, the Gulf States seek to 'brand' themselves by picking one or more of the 'traditional' activities ubiquitous throughout the Gulf. Even otherwise 'foreign' culture gets exhibited in museums. In Qatar, for example, the Museum of Islamic Art serves an important function, even though it does not contain a single item from Qatar, by tying the national identity within a broader Islamic framework.<sup>44</sup>

In addition to the building of museums, the Gulf States have invested considerable resources into archaeology, restoration of extant buildings, and nostalgic gentrification that frequently includes 'rebuilding' imagined buildings from the past. Notably, archaeology tends to focus on the Gulf as a region, a recognition of a common past but also a recognition that any 'national' archeological narratives will be incomplete.<sup>45</sup> Sometimes the drive to cultivate identity leads to the appropriation of other cultures' buildings. From the 1980s onwards, the Bahraini government has emphasized the preservation and restoration of archaeological and historical sites.<sup>46</sup> Curiously, in Bahrain even forts made by the Portuguese and Omanis have been culturally 'appropriated' and restored by the state.<sup>47</sup> Elsewhere in the Gulf, Persian and Indian architectural influences have been appropriated as "Gulf Arab" architecture.

Given the relative dearth of extant historical material culture, states have turned to 'living museums' and emphasize oral histories. The former put on display items linked with historical life and frequently feature re-enactments of such activities. For example, Kuwait hosts an annual Pearl Diving Festival, a Seaman's Day, and a Desert Day Festival – obviously seeking to placate all

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 107-111.

<sup>40</sup> Fred Lawson and Hassan al-Naboodah, "Cultural Heritage and Cultural Nationalism in the United Arab Emirates," in *Popular Culture and Identity in the Arab Gulf States*, ed. Alanoud Alsharekh and Robert Springborg (London, UK: Saqi Books, 2008), 20.

<sup>41</sup> Sulayman Khalaf, "The Nationalization of Culture: Kuwait's Invention of a Pearl-Diving Heritage," in *Popular Culture and Political Identity in the Arab Gulf States*, ed. Alanoud Alsharekh and Robert Springborg (London, UK: Saqi Books, 2008): 41.

<sup>42</sup> Lawson and al-Naboodah, "Cultural Heritage and Cultural Nationalism," 16.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>44</sup> Cooke, *Tribal Modern*, 84.

<sup>45</sup> Lawson and al-Naboodah, "Cultural Heritage and Cultural Nationalism," 19.

<sup>46</sup> Mohammad A. Alkhozai, "An Aspect of Cultural Development in Bahrain: Archaeology and the Restoration of Historical Sites," in *Popular Culture and Political Identity in the Arab Gulf States*, ed. Alanoud Alsharekh and Robert Springborg (London, UK: Saqi Books, 2008), 73.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 75-77.

sections of society and their different historical modes of life. These are all living museums that feature extravagant re-enactment. These activities are incredibly important, particularly the emphasis on pearling, one which has become part of the emblem of the state.<sup>48</sup> In addition to the emphasis on pearling, a regional obsession, camel racing has been elevated to extreme levels, particularly in the UAE.<sup>49</sup> In Qatar, in an attempt to differentiate itself from the UAE and Kuwait, the state has focused on dhow sailing and rowboat racing.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, symbols such as the Oryx, the Camel, the Falcon, the *dhallah* (coffee pot) are being appropriated by each state as part of their attempts at 'branding.'

The emphasis on oral histories and living museums has resulted in the transcribers of that history having a dominant position in the cultivation of national identity and the nature of the national narrative. One scholar has noted that through the collecting and memorisation of reminiscences in oral histories, the Zayed Center has played a key role:

In formulating and codifying a notion of the heritage of the UAE that underscores the importance of the Federation's more insular communities. Cultural icons, tropes, and practices that merit respect by virtue of their connection to the past are found to have been concentrated in the agricultural and pastoral districts of the interior, whose inhabitants have predominantly been Arabic-speaking and Sunni, rather than in the polyglot cities of the coast.<sup>51</sup>

At the same time, archaeological studies of the interior indicate that whilst the UAE has a long history, it only had marginal connections to the outside world – a notion that stands at odds with the cosmopolitan and heterogeneous cultures of the coastal areas.<sup>52</sup>

In addition to the obvious audience of tourists and citizens, scholars have noted a distinctly international goal driving the development of museums and heritage preservation. For example, Qatar's extensive engagement in UNESCO led to the trading town of Zubarah becoming a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Whilst this has obvious benefits for tourism by 'situating the country on the map,' it also puts Qatar into a world history narrative.<sup>53</sup> Similarly, Bahrain has been deeply engaged with UNESCO and had the Pearl Road Project turned into a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Notably, this honours Bahrain's role in 6,000 years of pearling, supposedly the oldest extant historical activity in the Middle East.<sup>54</sup>

Sport is one of the most powerful and visible means of cultivating identity in the Gulf.<sup>55</sup> All the states devote vast resources to the hosting of international sporting events in effectively every sport imaginable. It has been noted that the cost of doing so is so great that there is no financial return on the investment.

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<sup>48</sup> Khalaf, "The Nationalization of Culture," 63; The official emblem of the State of Kuwait is a pearling ship in the midst of the post-Independence Kuwaiti flag.

<sup>49</sup> Cooke, *Tribal Modern*, 103.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>51</sup> Lawson and al-Naboodah, "Cultural Heritage and Cultural Nationalism," 18-19.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>53</sup> Karen Exell, "Collecting an Alternative World: The Sheikh Faisal bin Qassim Al Thani Museum in Qatar," in *Cultural Heritage and the Arabian Peninsula: Debates, Discourses and Practices*, Edited by Karen Exell and Trinidad Rico (Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2014), 52.

<sup>54</sup> Cooke, *Tribal Modern*, 101.

<sup>55</sup> Abdullah Baabood, "Sport and Identity in the Gulf," in *Popular Culture and Political Identity in the Arab Gulf States*, Edited by Alanoud Alsharekh and Robert Springborg (London, UK: Saqi Books, 2008), 99.

Even so, the hosting of such events is becoming more prevalent. It has been argued that the main motivation for doing so is that sporting events provide a medium for engaging the world to demonstrate their ‘modernity’ and express their national identity.<sup>56</sup> A notable aspect of sport in national identity cultivation is the role of royalty who participate in sporting events such as equestrianism, rallying, and martial arts. That said, royalty do not participate in the most popular sport, football.

Royalty and the state are also involved in the revival of the *Nabati*-style poetry popular amongst the Bedouin of Arabia. The greatest manifestation of this phenomenon is the *Shair al-Milyoon* (The Million Poets) reality TV competition hosted in Abu Dhabi through the sponsorship of the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi.<sup>57</sup> The revival of Nabati poetry and its remarkable popularity in the Gulf – the competition draws in massive audiences – not only ‘brands’ nations as Cooke argues, it also helps foster a regional Gulf Arab identity through the popularisation of a high register of Gulf Arabic, a continuation of an earlier trend towards the harmonization of Gulf Arabic dialects.<sup>58</sup>

The Gulf states have also been active in popularising the ‘traditional dress.’ It has been noted that during the 1970s and 1980s, many Gulf Arab elites discarded Western attire and adopted the Gulf Arab ‘national dress’ in order to assert a regional Arab identity and distinguish themselves from the growing number of expatriates, particularly Arab expatriates.<sup>59</sup> With the sole exception of Oman, Persian and Indian style headdresses have been replaced with a purely Arabian headdress, the Najdi *agal* (head rope) worn with either the Najdi red and white checkered *shmagh* or the white *ghutrah* indigenous to Eastern Arabia.<sup>60</sup> Local dress signals not only nationality but also privileged socio-economic status.<sup>61</sup> In an attempt to brand each state, each Gulf Arab state has its own distinct style of *kandura* (loose robe), with different collar designs, button locations, in addition to different ways of donning the *shmagh* or *ghutrah*.

Regionalism also manifests itself in institutions and sports. For example, the Arab states of the Gulf, in addition to Iraq and Yemen, compete in the Gulf Cup, a biennial football tournament. The tournament has played an important role on developing national identities whilst simultaneously emphasizing a common regional and ethnic identity.<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, the development of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) has promoted the notion of *haweeya Khaleeji* (Gulf identity) as a distinct and spatially limited Arab identity that challenges pan-Islamism and pan-Arabism.<sup>63</sup>

The Gulf states’ attempts at identity cultivation have faced domestic criticism from the public and, in the case of the UAE, from the constituent Emirates. Pointing to museums and exhibits in different parts of the UAE, Victoria Hightower argues that pearling provides an excellent lens through which to understand the ambiguities and strength of the national narrative of the UAE.<sup>64</sup> Hightower argues that whilst pearl diving and trading were

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>58</sup> James Onley, “Transnational Merchant Families in the Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Gulf,” in *The Gulf Family: Kinship Policies and Modernity* (London, UK: Saqi Books, 2007), 47-48.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> Cooke, *Tribal Modern*, 124.

<sup>62</sup> Baabod, “Sport and Identity in the Gulf” 112.

<sup>63</sup> Patrick, *Nationalism in the Gulf*, 31-32.

<sup>64</sup> Victoria Penziner Hightower, “Purposeful Ambiguity: The Pearl Trade and Heritage Construction in the United Arab Emirates” in *Cultural Heritage and the Arabian Peninsula: Debates, Discourses and Practices*, Edited by Karen Exell and Trinidad Rico (Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2014), 71.

ubiquitous in the UAE's economic history, the rapid decline of that industry from the late 1920s was experienced differently in the various constituent Emirates and that this variation translates "directly, though subtly," to the constituent Emirates' museums.<sup>65</sup> Some oral histories note that whilst pearl diving was an important economic activity, during the winter, survival depended on hunting and camel herding, making problematic the distinction between settled and unsettled nomads.<sup>66</sup> A 1904 British document estimates the population of what is now the UAE to be 80,000, of whom only one tenth were nomadic Bedouin. Furthermore, the document states that 31 percent of the population of the Trucial States were engaged in pearling.<sup>67</sup> Moreover, the narrative has created a tension with the vestiges of the elder generation that engaged in pearl diving, for it romanticizes a brutal livelihood.<sup>68</sup> It should be noted that Hightower's observation can be extrapolated to other parts of the Gulf, not only with respect to pearling but to other social and economic activities. Indeed, a similar tension exists in Bahrain where the national museum emphasises the importance of pearling even though the majority population, the indigenous Shi'i Baharna did not engage in that activity. At the same time, agriculture, the Baharna's main activity, is ignored.<sup>69</sup>

Bristol-Rhys notes that the announcement in 2007 that Abu Dhabi would be building a Bedouin Museum was met with indigenous inhabitants' skepticism and derision.<sup>70</sup> Bristol-Rhys notes that her students complain about what they call the Bedouin myth in the official historical narrative. The official narrative focuses on the history of the ruling family of the most powerful Emirates, Abu Dhabi. This ruling family of Abu Dhabi, the al-Nahyan of the Bani Yas confederacy, is of Bedouin origin. As such, 'national' festivities focus on erecting Bedouin-style tents, a tradition quite alien to much of the population outside of Abu Dhabi where links with India and Iran were strong and lifestyles different.<sup>71</sup> Few of Bristol-Rhys' students think of themselves as Bedouin even if their families only settled but two generations in the past.<sup>72</sup> Moreover, the Emirates other than Abu Dhabi had a mostly settled historical existence.

Sub-national identities are a key aspect of 'Gulf identity.' Each and every Gulf state navigates this challenge, one that emerges, depending on the locale, from heterogeneity of socio-economic, ethnic/racial, religious, or tribal status. In the UAE, there is an additional source of sub-national identity. Unlike Qatar, Bahrain, and Kuwait, the UAE is not a unitary city-state. Furthermore, unlike Oman, it is not a unitary monarchy. The UAE is a confederation of seven highly autonomous Emirates under the federal tutelage of the economic, demographic, and geographic titan, Abu Dhabi. After over three decades of confederation, local emirate-based identity persists and manifests itself in 'top-down' and the 'bottom-up' forms. For example, Sharjah's Heritage Museum opened in 2012 and promotes not only Emirati identity, but also that of Sharjah's identity, focusing on the coastal and agrarian economic activities of

<sup>65</sup> Hightower, "Purposeful Ambiguity," 71; The decline of pearling as an activity of economic import was the result of the global economic woes of 1929 onwards and the introduction into the market of Japanese cultured pearl.

<sup>66</sup> Lawson and al-Naboodah, "Cultural Heritage and Cultural Nationalism," 17-18.

<sup>67</sup> Zahlan, *The Making of the Modern Gulf States*, 22.

<sup>68</sup> Cooke, *Tribal Modern*, 112.

<sup>69</sup> Patrick, *Nationalism in the Gulf*, 22.

<sup>70</sup> Bristol-Rhys, *Emirati Women*, 34.

<sup>71</sup> Patrick, *Nationalism in the Gulf*, 7.

<sup>72</sup> Bristol-Rhys, *Emirati Women*, 34; Bristol-Rhys notes that even her students who decent from families 'settled' into the Buyut as-Shaabiyya, social housing built for the Bedouin in the late 1960s, who maintain that their Bedouin ancestry has little resonance for them.

the Qawasim and their distinct history. Whilst it is easy to dismiss the ‘top-down’ sources of particular identity as cynical ploys by local leaders to maintain relevance and power, it is important to appreciate the origins of the bottom-up aspect. Whilst the common narrative of Gulf history is that the introduction of oil brought massive wealth to the peoples of the region, in the case of the UAE as in others, this was not necessarily true. This different historical experience with respect to oil, the result of the combination of the very political fragmentation of UAE politics, and the location of oil/gas reserves, has fostered the maintenance, if not the development, of local identities in the Emirates lacking substantial oil/gas wealth that have not developed as much in socio-economic terms and the populations resent this. That said, this variation of historical experience with respect to oil/gas wealth cannot be seen in Bahrain, Qatar or Kuwait, thus further reducing the credibility of notions of a common Gulf Arab historical experience or identity.

Given the absence of freedom of expression and democracy, it is difficult to ascertain how ‘solid’ the national identities of the Gulf states are. Yet, through sports, it can be seen that national identities are real and have genuine appeal. As one author notes, at a range of major sporting events, fans wave and drape themselves in their national flags and its colours.<sup>73</sup>

Even so, other scholars and this essay have argued, the process of national identity cultivation is beset with the failure of addressing the fundamental problem of reflecting the heterogeneity of identity and historical experience.<sup>74</sup> It has been noted that the establishment of the state in the Gulf is an “incomplete process” with citizenship and nationality are yet to harmonised.<sup>75</sup> As such, ‘native’ Qataris, Kuwaitis and Emiratis, those of ‘pure’ indigenous descent, have much more in terms of political rights.<sup>76</sup> As a result of this failure, between 1 and 10 percent of the population of the Gulf Arab states are stateless *bedoon*.<sup>77</sup> That such a substantial part of the minority ‘indigenous’ population is excluded (because, of course, the majority expatriates are totally excluded from discussions of identity, including this one) is indicative of the failures of identity cultivation. The greatest dichotomy is between citizens, those with socio-economic rights and privileges, and this is what identity manifests itself as.<sup>78</sup>

The study of identity in the Gulf is an emerging field. Whilst it is tempting to group these states together to present a common historical experience and to study identity, the variance in both categories makes the notions of Gulf history and Gulf identity(ies) problematic. Unfortunately, this paper has been unable to provide a solution to this problem. On the one hand, the states are too small and the historical sources too few to warrant the independent study of each polity. On the other hand, the historical and contemporary differences are too great to put together a coherent narrative about identity or history. Perhaps that is the solution: that the history of the Gulf continues to be what it has always been, a varied historical experience by a heterogeneous population.

<sup>73</sup> Baabod, “Sport and Identity in the Gulf,” 97.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>75</sup> Patrick, *Nationalism in the Gulf*, 20-21.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 20-21.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>78</sup> Patrick, 1.





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# “The Destruction of Jannat al-Baqī’ : A Case of Wahnābī Iconoclasm

By Adeel Mohammadi

*First in 1806 and then in 1925, forces loyal to the Wahnābī-Saudi alliance destroyed the domes, cupolas, and mausoleums decorating a famous Madinite cemetery, Jannat al-Baqī’ : “the Garden of Tree Stumps.” Far removed from the elaborate architecture of previous centuries, Muslims globally remain sore towards this act of Wahnābī iconoclasm — in which the tombs of some of early Islam’s most prominent figures were razed. The Baqī’ iconoclasm is often naively understood as part of a natural Wahnābī proclivity towards violence and destruction; an Islamic puritanism, obsessed with an opposition to shirk (associationism) at all costs. Exploring historical accounts of the cemetery, this paper approaches its destruction in light of the politics of the Wahnābī-Saudi project, challenging essentialized views of Wahnābism and arguing that the Baqī’ episode was motivated by its own internal logic within a larger Islamic legal and theological tradition.*

“The faith that drives Osama bin Laden and his followers is a particularly austere and conservative brand of Islam known as Wahnābism [...] Throughout the sect’s history, the Wahnābīs have fiercely opposed anything they viewed as *bida*, an Arabic word, usually muttered as a curse, for any change or modernization that deviates from the fundamental teachings of the Koran.”  
– *The New York Times*, October 6, 2001<sup>1</sup>

In many senses, discussions about so-called Wahnābism have been mediated by a particular lens, one that associates it primarily as the movement from which violence and extremism, the likes of Usāmah bin Lādan, have risen. Even before 2001, Wahnābism had been labeled a form of Islamic puritanism by many, gaining a reputation for severity and uncompromising deference to the foundational sources of Islam: the Qur’ān and the Sunnah of the Prophet. Named after Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Wahnāb (d. 1792), the movement—coalesced after ‘Abd al-Wahnāb’s death—argued for a stripping of the historical accretions found in Muslim culture and practice, and a return to the sources of Islam. This way, Wahnābīs could re-establish the religion in its purest form, the one practiced in the era of the Prophet and his Companions. Wahnābism, now the state ideology in Saudi Arabia, has been criticized by non-Muslims and Muslims alike for its so-called absolutism and rage-induced destructiveness, as well as its political power to impose its “puritanism” onto the Arabian Peninsula and the larger Muslim world. As the Saudi government proudly maintains itself as the caretaker of the holy shrines in Makkah and Madinah, this ability to impose is all the more threatening; perhaps best exemplified in the Wahnābī destruction of various shrines in the decades since

<sup>1</sup> Neil MacFarquhar, “A Nation Challenged: Teachings; Bin Laden and His Followers Adhere To an Austere, Stringent Form of Islam,” *New York Times*, October 7, 2001, accessed May 8, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/10/07/world/nation-challenged-teachings-bin-laden-his-followers-adhere-austere-stringent.html>.

the political ascension of the Sa‘ūd family. Yet, this purported Wahhābī proclivity to destroy and impose is, in fact, a cogent legal expression of political power, situated both in the geo- and religio-politics of the Arabian Peninsula and the larger Islamic tradition.

This paper is primarily concerned with one cemetery, the Jannat al-Baqī‘, located in the Hijazi city of Madinah. By describing its significance and the subsequent destruction of its monuments, domes, and mausoleums by Saudi/Wahhābī forces first in 1806 and then in 1925, I hope to unpack this episode of iconoclasm and situate it in a larger Wahhābī expansion as the movement sought to gain political and religious authority in the greater Peninsula. In trying to understand the logic behind the cemetery’s destruction, I hope to challenge the narratives about inherently violent or iconoclastic tendencies that plague not only Wahhabism, but Islam in general.<sup>2</sup>

### Jannat al-Baqī‘

Jannat al-Baqī‘, literally the “garden of tree stumps,”<sup>3</sup> (also known as Baqī‘ al-Gharqad, “the field of thorny trees”<sup>4</sup>) is located southeast of the famous Prophet’s Mosque. Though used as a cemetery before the inception of Islam, after the first Companion of the Prophet was buried there in 624/5, the site has been synonymous with Islamic piety—and even to this day, Muslims aspire to be buried in it if they die during pilgrimage to the holy city of Madinah.<sup>5</sup> Jannat al-Baqī‘’s significance cannot be understated—after all, buried within it are many of Islam’s most prominent early figures, including Ibrāhīm (the infant son of the Prophet), Faṭimah and Ruqayyah (daughters of the Prophet), ‘Uthmān b. ‘Affān (the third caliph), Ḥasan b. ‘Alī (the grandson of the Prophet), Ja‘far al-Šādiq (famous scholar and sixth Shi‘ī Imam), and Mālik b. Anas (famous jurist and founder of the Mālikī school of law).

The Baqī‘ that remains is far removed from what it once was. Records show that the cemetery was adorned with cupolas, domes, and mausoleums, particularly centered around the major gravesites,<sup>6</sup> today, the cemetery is an empty property without buildings or monuments, a striking expanse adjacent to the second holiest mosque in the world. In this section, we briefly examine historical records—travelogues and *laudes urbium* texts—to construct a narrative of the old Baqī‘ and to give a sense of its significance to both local Madanites and foreigners.

Native Madanite accounts are difficult to come by, particularly in translation. Thus, a very valuable account of Madinah is provided by Muḥammad Kibrīt (d. 1660), a native Madanite who wrote *Kitāb al-Jawāhir al-Thamīnah fī Maḥāsīn al-Madīnah* (“The Book of the Precious Jewels Concerning the Beauties of the City”).<sup>7</sup> This text, written in the *faḍā‘il* (praise) genre, corresponds to the *laudes urbium* genre of Latin and Greek literature. Because of its express mention of Baqī‘, it gives us an interesting glimpse into a pre-modern Madanite view of one his city’s most famous landmarks, and the

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, the extremely important work Finbarr Barry Flood, “Between Cult and Culture: Bamiyan, Islamic Iconoclasm, and the Museum,” *The Art Bulletin* 84 (2002): 641-59.

<sup>3</sup> Shaikh Safiur-Rahman Mubarakpuri, *History of Madina Munawwarah* (Riyadh: Maktaba Dar-us-Salam, 2002), 130.

<sup>4</sup> Ondrej Beranek and Pavel Tupek, “From Visiting Graves to Their Destruction: The Question of Ziyara through the Eyes of Salafis,” *Brandeis University Crown Paper* 2 (2009): 23.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Galal Fakkar, “Hajis envy those who died during pilgrimage,” *McClathy – Tribune Business News*, November 20, 2010.

<sup>6</sup> Beranek and Tupek, “Visiting Graves,” 23.

<sup>7</sup> M.J.L. Young, “In Praise of the City of the Prophet: the ‘Kitāb al-Jawharāt al-Thamīnah fī Maḥāsīn al-Madīnah’ of Muḥammad Kibrīt ibn ‘Abdallāh al-Ḥusaynī al-Madani,” *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* 16 (1986): 203-214.

practices associated with it. Kibrīt recommends any person hoping to have his prayers answered to go on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the month of Dhu al-Ḥijjah, to the tomb of Ismāʿīl b. Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, within the Baqīʿ cemetery. There, he should pray two *rakʿahs* (cycles) and recite the Qurʾānic chapters Fātiḥah and Iklās one hundred times each; this should, according to Kibrīt, ensure the granting of the prayer. Kibrīt received this formula from an unnamed “certain excellent person,”<sup>8</sup> indicating that such practices at the Baqīʿ cemetery were long-standing and widespread, being passed down from generation to generation without a need to identify the *sanad* (chain of transmission). The Baqīʿ cemetery, therefore, had significance outside honoring the dead—widespread belief held that specific prayers would also be answered if a supplicant visited the cemetery and carried out certain rites. We see from this account that the tombs, cupolas, and mausoleums decorating the cemetery were not in fact the objects of reverence; rather, they decorated the tombs which were the loci of particular rituals, later seen as heterodox. In light of Wāḥḥābī criticisms of associationism (*shirk*) and the veneration of saints, Kibrīt’s recommendation foretells a serious debate between Wāḥḥābism and other visions of Islam present in the Hijaz—over certain rituals and their perceived incompatibility with *tawḥīd* (the oneness of God)—that witnessed the eventual destruction of Baqīʿ.

Another historical record comes to us from a European, J.L. Burckhardt, who visited Madinah in 1815, nearly a decade after the initial destruction of the Baqīʿ by Wāḥḥābī forces in 1806.<sup>9</sup> Burckhardt finds the ruins of domes and buildings littered around the cemetery, but, understanding the Madanites as “niggardly” people “who are little disposed to incur any expense in honouring the remains of their celebrated countrymen,” he is confident that the cemetery lay in disrepair even before the Wāḥḥābī destruction.<sup>10</sup>

Burckhardt’s observation that pilgrims come to say prayers at the cemetery is useful to our discussion, as he notes that during particular festivals they would place palm branches upon the graves of deceased relatives.<sup>11</sup> Recognizing the treasure trove of graves found in Baqīʿ, Bruckhardt comments, “So rich is Medina in the remains of great saints that they have almost lost their individual importance, while the relics of [even] one of the persons [...] would be sufficient to render celebrated any other Moslim town.”<sup>12</sup> Burckhardt’s account is important because it confirms the significance of Baqīʿ as a place of ritual, as a point of civic pride, and as a locus of iconoclastic violence.

Interestingly, the ruined tombs and mausoleums did not prevent Muslims from continuing with their practices at the Baqīʿ cemetery; in some sense, in conscious opposition to the initial destruction of 1806, we can imagine that Muslims continued with their graveside rituals—practices abhorred by the Wāḥḥābīs, obsessed with *tawḥīd*, who had since left the Hijaz. Clearly, then, physical destruction was not enough to prevent these practices. Wāḥḥābī criticism was against the rituals surrounding tomb visitation, as these rituals were perceived as *shirk*; the destruction of the tomb façades did not prevent people from performing the rituals, the structures merely decorating the sites. To eliminate the rituals, the destruction would have to be accompanied with the

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 210.

<sup>9</sup> John Lewis Burckhardt, *Travels in Arabia* (London: Frank Cass, 1968), 362-69.

<sup>10</sup> Burckhardt, *Travels in Arabia*, 362-63.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 364.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 363.

political power to prevent such practices, a coincidence finally realized with the second destruction in 1925 and the creation of the modern Saudi state soon thereafter.

What was described in 1815 as a state of disrepair had been restored by the turn of the century, under the direction of the Ottoman Sultan ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd II. Another account, this time from an Egyptian official—Ibrāhīm Rif‘at Pāshā—travelling between 1901 and 1908, gives us a typical view of Baqī‘ between the first and second destructions.<sup>13</sup> Rif‘at Pāshā describes sixteen prominent dome structures marking graves, both individually and collectively. Among them, the most notable are the tombs of the third caliph, ‘Uthmān, along with several of the Prophet’s wives, his children, and other family members. Rif‘at Pāshā also describes of prayers to be said when visiting these sites, particularly at the grave of ‘Uthmān. This travelogue account provides glimpse of the pre-1925 Baqī‘, a cemetery that clearly hosted a number of special rituals and prayers among pilgrims, coming as far as Egypt and beyond.

### Wahhābism

We can see, then, that the special significance many Muslims have attributed to the cemetery of Baqī‘ came into conflict with Wahhābī theological commitments. To the Wahhābī sensibility, the practices of visiting graves expressly for the fulfillment of prayers imbued these graves with powers, thus violating a strict interpretation of *tawḥīd* (monotheism). Yet, the story is not so simple: The narrative constructed around the destruction of Baqī‘, and of the rise of Wahhābism in general, emphasizes a proclivity within Wahhābism towards violence, as if the destruction of the Baqī‘ graveyard was a natural consequence of Wahhābī expansion. In what follows, I hope to complicate this idea, arguing that the destruction had a logic of its own, located within Islamic legal tradition and motivated by reasons just as much political as ideological.

“Wahhābism”<sup>14</sup> as a label is problematic, for it is easy to fall into the trap that Wahhābism represents some monolithic entity, a type of cult around its founder, Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Wahhāb (d. 1792). The term “Wahhābism” itself is contested; many within the ranks of the movement, wary of the elevation of their founder, instead prefer the term *muwahhidūn* (unitarians).<sup>15</sup> One would be misguided to think that the movement did not express diversity both horizontally, among its membership, and vertically, with changes over time.

To talk about the movement in meaningful terms, we can comment on some salient, common features of Wahhābism. One theme emerges as a central focus: an obsessive promotion of *tawḥīd* (monotheism) and the resistance to *shirk* (associationism) in all its forms.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, this emerges as the principal tenet of the movement, one that can be implicated in the acts of destruction we address below. Additionally, Wahhābism has had a political dimension since its inception; the 1744 alliance between ‘Abd al-Wahhāb and Muḥammad b. Sa‘ūd would set the framework for a religious-political allegiance which exists to the present day in the modern Saudi state.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Sulṭān Ghālib al-Qu‘ayṭī, “The Hajj at the Time of the Visits of Ibrāhīm Rif‘at Pāshā,” in *The Holy Cities, The Pilgrimage, and the World of Islām: A History from the Earliest Traditions until 1925 (1344H)* (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae 2007).

<sup>14</sup> A complete introduction to Wahhābism can be found in Natana DeLong-Bas, *Wahhābī Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>15</sup> James Noyes, *The Politics of Iconoclasm: Religion, Violence and the Culture of Image-Breaking in Christianity and Islam* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013), 59-92.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>17</sup> Natana DeLong-Bas, “Islam and Power in Saudi Arabia,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Islam and Politics*, ed. John L. Esposito and Emad El-Din Shahin (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 411-22.

When ‘Abd al-Wahhāb died in 1792, the movement was largely a localized, regional reformist movement. It is in looking at the generations after his death, that we see Wahhābism gaining both notoriety and the political efficacy to carry out its religious reforms. Nevertheless, the biography of ‘Abd al-Wahhāb himself cannot be ignored. While critics of Wahhābism are often more interested in bigger iconoclasm in the years after his death, two important events during his lifetime are evidence for a supposed Wahhābī proclivity to violence: the chopping of sacred trees in al-‘Uyaynah,<sup>18</sup> and the destruction of the tomb of Zayd b. al-Khaṭṭāb<sup>19</sup> in al-Jubaylah.<sup>20</sup> In many senses, these anecdotes have come to characterize and caricaturize the movement and its leader, having become more anti-Wahhābī lore and less historical recollection.

In the case of tree-chopping, ‘Abd al-Wahhāb provided what one scholar has called “a positive visual aid for the implications of true adherence to *tawhīd*.”<sup>21</sup> People would hang objects from trees in order to seek intercession, blessing, or answers to prayers. ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, viewing this as a violation of doctrine, was vehemently opposed—employing a number of people to cut down smaller trees and himself chopping the largest. By doing so, he created a prominent visual symbol to announce his seriousness about *tawhīd* and his unwillingness to permit what he perceived as *shirk*.

The second case involved the destruction of the tomb of Zayd b. al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 623), a Companion of the Prophet and brother of the second caliph. This shrine was immensely popular, and people would venerate it in ways that were at odds with ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s commitments.<sup>23</sup> Despite resistance from residents of al-Jubaylah, and the importance of the site for economic reasons, ‘Abd al-Wahhāb—along with an army of approximately six hundred men—succeeded in destroying the tomb. In both cases of destruction (and in contradistinction to the Baqī‘ case), the actual sites have been largely forgotten by both Muslim polemicists and scholars; instead, what remains is ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s legacy as a raging iconoclast.

Natana DeLong-Bas argues that the principles of *jihād* (legitimated warfare) and *tafkīr* (excommunication), two hallmarks essentialized with Wahhābism in modern discussions, are actually *post facto* accretions that do not receive significant attention in the writings of ‘Abd al-Wahhāb himself.<sup>24</sup> Instead of receiving serious scholarly attention, Wahhābism has become synonymous with intolerance, violence, and destruction.<sup>25</sup>

### The Razing of Baqī‘

That Wahhābism is generally ignored as a serious and internally cogent system is reflected in discussions around the destruction of the Baqī‘ cemetery. For the most part, the topic has not received serious academic consideration—surprising, considering the cemetery’s significance to Muslims around the

<sup>18</sup> DeLong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam*, 24-25.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 25-26.

<sup>20</sup> Itzhak Weismann, *Ottoman Reform and Muslim Segregation* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005), 68, 94 note 37.

<sup>21</sup> DeLong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam*, 25.

<sup>22</sup> Samer Traboulsi, “An Early Refutation of Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s Reformist Views,” *Die Welt des Islams* 42 (2002): 376.

<sup>23</sup> DeLong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam*, 25-26. Interestingly, ‘Abd al-Wahhāb received scathing criticism from his contemporary Sulaymān b. Suhaym (d. 1767) for this act of tomb-destruction. Ibn Suhaym argued that there were practical reasons for the erection of a tomb for Zayd b. al-Khaṭṭāb—that the ground was too rocky to bury the body, and so there a stone tomb was required. Ibn Suhaym saw ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s act against purported idolatry to be a miscalculation. See David Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 19-20.

<sup>24</sup> DeLong-Bas, “Islam and Power,” 412.

<sup>25</sup> Samira Haj, *Reconfiguring Islamic Tradition: Reform, Rationality, and Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 30-31.



globe. Most commentary on the topic is, instead, produced by Muslims angry about what they perceive as an act of cultural vandalism.<sup>26</sup> This paper hopes to challenge this trend and instead examine the iconoclastic episode as motivated by its own logic.

The two acts of destruction were carried out first in 1806 by forces loyal to the Wahhābī-Saudi alliance, and then 1925, by the forces of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Āl Sa‘ūd, the first monarch of the Saudi state.<sup>27</sup> These iconoclasts came from the Najd region, in the East Peninsula. After the initial destruction of 1806—when some report that the Wahhābī forces even wanted to destroy the iconic dome over the Prophet’s tomb but were dissuaded or prevented from doing so—control of the region returned to Ḥijāzī forces loyal to the Ottoman Empire, and the structures decorating the cemetery were reconstructed under the patronage of Sultan ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd II until they were finally destroyed in 1925.<sup>28</sup>

While it would be easy to perceive Wahhābī thought as inherently destructive, there are alternative explanations for the iconoclasm at Jannat al-Baqī‘; explanations grounded in practical considerations and located within a larger Islamic tradition.

### *Political Motivations*

The Wahhābī movement was decidedly political. Theoretically, the Muslim community’s leader was responsible for “enjoining the good and forbidding the evil” (*al-amr bil-ma‘rūf wal-nahī ‘an al-munkar*).<sup>29</sup> It was only inasmuch as the leader had the political agency to accomplish this that it became relevant as a policy objective.<sup>30</sup> If the leader were actively to enjoin good and forbid evil, it would be an indication of his political power and broader authority. This helps explain why the Wahhābī forces—coming from the distant Najd—were insistent upon the destruction of the tombs at Baqī‘: they represented a symbol of competing religious authority, the destruction of which would signify the forbidding of evil and the promotion of good (as interpreted by Wahhābī understanding of *tawḥīd*) vis-à-vis newly acquired political power.

In a singular study on Wahhābī iconoclasm, James Noyes comments that the rejection of traditions like “the veneration of Islamic shrines in the Hijazi cities of Mecca and Medina [...] reflected a desire for unity not only in the theological approach to God but also in the political approach to land [...] Thus iconoclasm represented, for Wahhabism, a means of bridging the principles of theological and political unity.”<sup>31</sup> This also helps explain why one of the first matters of business in the newly founded Saudi state was the establishment of a new Makkān institution in 1926, the “Committee for Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong,” which included both Ḥijāzī and Najdī scholars and engaged in activities like imposing prayer and curbing foul language.<sup>32</sup>

Thus the iconoclasm against Baqī‘’s monuments can be seen as a political act to establish Najdī authority—both religious (possessed by the Najdī, Wahhābī scholars) and political (in the hands of the Sa‘ūd family)—in the Hijaz. This tradition of controlling narratives through public expression

<sup>26</sup> See, for example, Hanan Chehata, “Saudi ‘cultural vandalism’ of Muslim heritage continues,” *Middle East Eye*, April 14, 2014, accessed May 8, 2014, <http://www.middleeasteye.net/culture/saudi-cultural-vandalism-muslim-heritage-continues>.

<sup>27</sup> Baranek and Tupek, “Visiting Graves,” 23.

<sup>28</sup> Irfan Ahmed, “The Destruction of the Holy Sites in Mecca and Medina,” *Islamica* 15 (2006): 71-74.

<sup>29</sup> This phrase is found in the Qur’ān, 3:104, 3:110, 7:157, 9:71.

<sup>30</sup> For a thorough and important discussion on this ethical topic of enjoining good and forbidding evil, see Michael Cook, *Forbidding Wrong in Islam* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>31</sup> Noyes, *Politics of Iconoclasm*, 60-61. Emphasis original.

<sup>32</sup> Cook, *Forbidding Wrong in Islam*, 126-27.

continues into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as Saudi political authorities created strict understandings of history, and more broadly “truth,” through socialization and education policy.<sup>33</sup> On a global scale, beginning in the 1980s, the king of Saudi Arabia proudly proclaimed himself the “Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques,” a title that had gone unused for centuries.<sup>34</sup> By controlling these symbols—and announcing this control through the destruction of the iconic Baqīʿ—the Saudi political authorities sought to broadcast their newly acquired political power on a global platform. And what more global symbol than the most famous graveyard in the Muslim world, visited yearly by pilgrims from across the world?

### *The Destruction within a Legal Context*

While the destruction of Baqīʿ was certainly political, like every other human act, it is under the scrutiny of Islamic law. In exploring legal discussions surrounding grave monuments, we begin with a medieval scholar often referred to as the “direct spiritual ancestor” of the Wahhabi movement: ibn Taymiyyah (d. 1328).<sup>35</sup> In his short text *Qāʿidah fī Ziyārat Bayt al-Muqaddas* (“The Rules of Visiting the Holy House [i.e. Jerusalem]”), ibn Taymiyyah permits the visitation of the sites in Jerusalem, but makes it clear that they should be treated like any other prayer space—for prayer, remembrance of God, individual supplication, and the reading of the Qurʾān. But he is clear in his condemnation of other rituals, like the circumambulation of sites—a practice that ought to be uniquely restricted to the Kaʿbah in Makkah. Thus we see that issues about the visitation and devotional practices at important sites—including graves—are not new with Wahhābism.

Though the ʿAbd al-Wahhāb died more than a decade before the initial destruction of Baqīʿ, he commented on the issue of grave visitation in general. ʿAbd al-Wahhāb considered the visiting of graves as permissible or even recommended, for it reminded believers of their mortality and demonstrated deference to God’s immortality.<sup>36</sup> But he is also wary of graves because he laments that *al-Lāt*, one of the major pre-Islamic Arab idols, came about because a pious man’s grave became a charismatic site for worship.<sup>37</sup> He also identifies the decoration of graves with lights as impermissible.<sup>38</sup> Importantly, ʿAbd al-Wahhāb was not unique among his contemporaries in the condemnation of charismatic practices at gravesites. Even Ḥasab b. Ḥasan Khuzbak, a vocal critic of Wahhābism and a contemporary of ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, urged people not to bow, kiss, touch, or circumambulate the tombs of the pious.<sup>39</sup>

In the weeks leading up to the second destruction of Baqīʿ, a group of 15 Madanite ʿulamāʿ, at the request of ʿAbd Allah b. Bulayhid—a prominent Najdī scholar—issued a *fatwā* unanimously condemning the construction of mausoleums around graves, and citing two *ḥadīth* of the Prophet to justify their decision.<sup>40</sup> Though we can imagine there to have been a number of political and

<sup>33</sup> See Afshī Shahī, *The Politics of Truth Management in Saudi Arabia* (New York: Routledge, 2013), esp. 33-61.

<sup>34</sup> For more about this topic, see Fouad Farsy, *Custodian of the two Holy Mosques, King Fahd bin Abdul Aziz* (Guernsey, Channel Islands: Knight Communications, 2001).

<sup>35</sup> Charles D. Matthews, “A Muslim Iconoclast (Ibn Taymiyyah) on the ‘Merits’ of Jerusalem and Palestine,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 56 (1936): 1-21.

<sup>36</sup> Haj, *Reconfiguring Islamic Tradition*, 57.

<sup>37</sup> Muhammad ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd* [The book of monotheism] (Riyadh: *Jāmiʿat al-Imām Muḥammad bin Saʿūd al-Islāmiyyah*, n.d.), 64-65.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>39</sup> Haj, 58-9.

<sup>40</sup> “Fetwa’ di ‘ulamā’ medinesi contro i mausolei e la venerazione superstiziosa delle tombe,” *Oriente Moderno* 6 (1926): 2

other pressures on this group of Madanite scholars to issue an opinion favorable to Wahhābī iconoclasts, we can also see that it was—and continues to be—important for Wahhābī iconoclasm to operate *within* the logic of Islamic law, and Islamic tradition more broadly. Destruction, then, is not merely an inherent property of Wahhābī expression; it is a calculated and negotiated expression, acting—for better or for worse—within a larger tradition.

To this day, modern scholars—like ‘Abd al-‘Azīz b. Bāz (d. 1999), the Grand Muftī of Saudi Arabia—make it a point to examine this topic. On the building of monuments on graves, bin Bāz and his associates issue an emphatic opinion against this practice, calling it an unsanctioned innovation (*bid‘ah*) in the religion, and calls on the leader of the Muslims to eliminate these structures because they are the means (*dharīyah*) to associationism (*shirk*).<sup>41</sup> That the issue is discussed in the modern day demonstrates that Wahhābī attitudes towards graveyard constructions are subject to legal scrutiny rather than some inherent proclivity to destruction

### *Shi‘ī - Sunnī Motivations*

It is reported that when ‘Abd al-Wahhāb first visited the city of Basra, in modern-day Iraq,<sup>42</sup> he was shocked at Shi‘ī practices surrounding the graves of their Imams.<sup>43</sup> Since then, a high degree of scrutiny towards Shi‘ism has been a salient feature of Wahhabism, with ‘Abd al-Wahhāb even accusing some Shi‘īs of *kufr* (disbelief)<sup>44</sup> and *irtidād* (apostasy). However, unlike other Sunni scholars of his age, ‘Abd al-Wahhāb showed an impressive knowledge of Shi‘ism and seriously engaged with Shi‘ī literature in his *Risālah fī al-Radd ‘alā al-Rāfiḍah*—possibly because of his early familiarity with Shi‘ism during his time in Basra.<sup>46</sup>

Borrowing from their eponymous leader’s critical attitude towards Shi‘ism, Wahhābī forces—a decade after the death of ‘Abd al-Wahhāb—marched north to the major Shi‘ī cities of Najaf and Karbala, where the tombs of ‘Alī and Husayn are located. In 1802, the forces destroyed Shi‘ī shrines in the two cities, including the tombs of the two Imams.<sup>47</sup> Shi‘ī polemics remember the destruction in these two cities as particularly incensing, one source calling it a “tragedy... immortalized by eulogies composed by poets from Karbala and elsewhere.”<sup>48</sup> The destruction of the tombs in Najaf and Karbala set a precedent for violence against Shi‘ī shrines, including Baqī‘.

While not explicitly a Shi‘ī shrine, I suggest here that another motivating factor for the destruction of Baqī‘ lay in the fact that the cemetery figures prominently in the Shi‘ī tradition, with the remains of a number of Imams and members of the *ahl al-bayt* (family of the Prophet) buried therein. Though many of these personalities carry importance in both the Sunnī and Shi‘ī traditions, Shi‘ī deference towards Imams and the *ahl al-bayt* is more

<sup>41</sup> Abd al-‘Azīz b. Bāz et al., *al-Bida’ wal-Muḥdathāt wa-mā lā ‘Aṣl lahu* (Riyadh: Dar Ibn Khuzaymah, 1419/1999), 294-95.

<sup>42</sup> DeLong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam*, 22.

<sup>43</sup> Raihan Ismail, “The Saudi Ulama and the Shi‘a of Saudi Arabia,” *Journal of Shi‘a Islamic Studies* 5 (2012): 403-22.

*Al-rāfiḍah* is a term—often used pejoratively by Wahhābīs—for those Shi‘ī who reject the legitimacy of the first caliphs before ‘Alī. See Wilferd Madelung, “Shiism: An Overview,” *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Lindsay Jones. 2nd ed., vol. 12 (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005), 8322.

<sup>44</sup> Guido Steinberg, “The Wahhabiyya and Shi‘ism, from 1744/5 to 2008,” in *The Sunna and Shi‘a in History: Division and Ecumenism in the Muslim Middle East*, eds. Ofra Bengio and Meir Litvak (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 166; DeLong-

<sup>45</sup> DeLong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam*, 83-90.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 83-85.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 83, 308 note 229.

<sup>48</sup> Yasin Al-Jibouri, “A Brief Biography of the Founder of Wahhabism,” *Islamic Books*, n.d., Accessed May 8, 2014, <http://islamicbooks.info/H-23-Interesting%20Articles/index.html>.

pronounced than anything in the normative Sunnī tradition.<sup>49</sup> Considering the history of Wahnābī destruction against Shi‘ī shrines alongside Wahnābīsm’s generally antagonistic position towards Shi‘ism, Baqī‘’s destruction asymmetrically affected Shi‘īs more than it did Sunnīs.

The Shi‘īs of Madinah—called the Nakhāwilah<sup>50</sup>—have been continuously living in Madinah since the first decades of Islam. Not only did indigenous Shi‘īs feel offended by the destruction of the Baqī‘’s shrines, “ever since the mid-1920s, the grief felt by Shiite visitors to the old cemetery [...] has been exacerbated by the knowledge that the shrines of their Imams in Iraq and Iran [reconstructed after 1802...] are covered by cupolas and richly decorated with gold, silver, mirrors etc. The extreme simplicity of the tombs of the Imams at Medina therefore comes as a shock to them.”<sup>51</sup>

Shi‘ī visitors from abroad especially felt the sting of Baqī‘’s destruction as they came to make pilgrimage to the Hijaz. For a Wahnābī movement looking to announce its victory not only over the Hijaz but also over Shi‘ism, the cemetery provided a perfect venue. Indeed, we can imagine Shi‘ī—and, for that matter, Sunnī—visitors to Madinah recounting their stories of finding the Baqī‘ cemetery destroyed upon their return home. And considering a particular history of grave destruction in 19<sup>th</sup> century Iran, where political dissidents and heretics were posthumously exhumed, burned, and their tombs destroyed,<sup>52</sup> we can also get a valuable indication of why the grave-destruction in the holy city of Madinah was such a poignant declaration to the global Muslim community. The years 1806 and 1925 witnessed a unilateral announcement by the Wahnābīs with the destruction of Baqī‘: Islam in Arabia—in its contemporary expressions as well as its relics and history—were now under the control of Wahnābī/Saudi forces.

## Conclusion

Condemnation of the Saudi destruction of Muslim sites continues to this day, with a new wave of criticism attacking the regime for conveniently disposing of historically valuable sites, particularly in Makkah, in making way for massive commercial complexes—killing two birds with one stone, so to speak.<sup>53</sup> This new wave of criticism—against the conversion of Makkah into “a new Las Vegas”—is significant in its counter to previous tropes of Wahnābī destructionism with a new narrative of Saudi motivation—ignoble, though at the least logically cogent.

To understand Wahnābī actions as simply an inherent proclivity towards violence and destruction is untenable: the destruction of the Baqī‘ cemetery was motivated by a particular set of political, legal, and sectarian reasons. While the destruction of Islam’s most famous cemetery is a common point of anti-Saudi dissent in the modern Muslim world, it is also a topic hitherto unexplored in any serious academic way, presumably because Wahnābī destruction seemed not to require justification. We present here a challenge to this essentialized narrative, arguing that Wahnābīsm is not a movement of desert-anger but rather motivated by an internal logic that is, if not agreeable, at the very least is understandable.

<sup>49</sup> Except, perhaps, some forms of Sufi practice—not coincidentally another major target of Wahnābī destruction.

<sup>50</sup> A thorough study on the Nakhāwilah can be found in Werner Ende, “The Nakhāwīla, a Shite Community in Medina Past and Present,

<sup>51</sup> *Die Welt des Islams, New Series*, 37 (1997): 263-348.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 265-66.

<sup>53</sup> See Mehrdad Amanat, “Set in Stone: Homeless Corpses and Desecrated Graves in Modern Iran,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 44 (2012): 257-283.

<sup>54</sup> Hanan Chehata, “Saudi ‘cultural vandalism.’”



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# Revolutionary Terrorism in Algeria and Palestine: A Framework for Explanation

By Graham Atkins

*The Algerian National Liberation Front and Palestinian Liberation Organisation's use of violence for intimidation and coercion during the 1950s and 70s have been controversial areas of study for historians and political scientists. Whilst some scholars contend that political violence in Muslim-majority countries can be explained by something inherent in Islamic culture or religion, this paper takes a different approach. Through comparing the similar patterns of political violence in the Algerian War for Independence against France, and the Palestinian political struggle against Israel following the June 1967 War, this paper contends that the resort to terrorism must be understood by analysing the claims and motivations of political actors involved, rather than invoking the orientalist assumption that there is something violent in an unchanging 'Islamic culture.' This paper concludes that terrorism initially emerged due to the failure of alternative strategies, and was later continued as it served useful political and strategic functions for political elites within Algerian and Palestinian guerrilla organisations.*

On November 1<sup>st</sup> 1954, the Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN) proclaimed that they aimed at the “internationalisation of the Algerian problem.”<sup>1</sup> Seven years later, in 1963, the draft charter of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) declared that the proposed National Assembly would form a political committee, charging it with “studying the political sides of the Palestine question in the Arab and international fields.”<sup>2</sup> Operating during the age of Cold War and decolonization, Algerian and Palestinian revolutionary guerrilla organisations were crucially aware of the benefits of internationalising their struggles, and the role terrorism could play in that strategy. Defining terrorism as “the use or threat of violence to intimidate or coerce, often for political ends,” this paper will investigate why guerrilla organisations chose to use terrorist methods in their struggles against France and Israel. Whilst terrorism emerged as a strategy for different and specific historical logics, this paper will argue that there is a common set of factors that are sufficient to explain how terrorism came to characterise the revolutionary politics of 1950-70s Algeria and Palestine.

The FLN, PLO, and other Palestinian groups began to use terrorist tactics because of the failure of alternative strategies to achieve French and Israeli withdrawal, and the asymmetry of the conflicts. Terrorism was then continued as a political strategy to internationalize the conflicts, gather more recruits, and establish the dominance and credibility of particular guerrilla organisations. In order to evaluate the explanatory account given above, this paper will consider the arguments above, before questioning an alternative explanation that

<sup>1</sup>“To the Algerian People,” Front de Liberation Nationale, accessed March 8, 2014, <http://www.marxists.org/history/algeria/1954/proclamation.htm>

<sup>2</sup>The Draft Constitution of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (1963), accessed March 9, 2014, <http://www.thejerusalemfund.org/www.thejerusalemfund.org/carryover/documents/draft.html>



terrorism was an assertion of the colonized man's freedom and humanity. Finally, this paper will consider the caveat that the vast majority of Algerians and Palestinians never participated at a level above tacit support for these methods, undermining the view that Arab or Islamic culture accounts for the use of political violence.

Firstly, it is worth noting that the failure of alternative strategies occurred before the creation of most Algerian and Palestinian guerrilla organisations. The resort to armed conflict in general, and terrorism specifically, should be seen in a longer colonial context. In Algeria, the older nationalist elite had failed to achieve decolonization through negotiation with the French. Despite the efforts of Ferhat Abbas, Messali Hadj and other interwar Algerian integrationists and nationalists, the French government refused to make concessions to Algerian Muslims. Even the highly conservative Blum-Violette bill, which had proposed only to allow a small minority of Algerian Muslims to obtain full French citizenship, failed to reach the floor of the French National Assembly due to the opposition settler lobby in 1936. In response to the FLN's 1954 declaration, Pierre Mendès-France, the contemporaneous Minister of Foreign Affairs, asserted the Algerian departments were "irrevocably French," effectively destroying any possibility of negotiations.<sup>3</sup> The removal of Jacques Soustelle, a reformist socialist governor who had tried to empower the Algerian legislature and established a modest agrarian reform programme, in 1956 furthered Algerian perceptions of French intransigence.<sup>4</sup> Even in 1959, the French refused to negotiate with the FLN, determined to portray them as "ambitious agitators determined to set up [a] totalitarian dictatorship," as John Ruedy aptly summarises.<sup>5</sup>

In comparison, resort to Palestinian-led conflict in the Palestinian case owed as much to the failure of the Arab states working on behalf of the Palestinians, as to the failure of the limited diplomacy that took place after 1948. Despite Arab nationalist rhetoric which stressed the importance of liberating Palestine, the 1967 defeat of the Arab states demonstrated the "proof of the bankruptcy of [Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser's] secular model of reform through Westernization," and the institutions and organisations associated with Arab nationalism, for many Palestinians.<sup>6</sup> Malcolm Kerr also notes that the Arab states looked increasingly divided in the 1960s, summarised aptly by an anonymous Lebanese journalist who argued that "Israel [was now] simply one of the countries of this region that boycott each other."<sup>7</sup> This disunity helped inspire the creation of independent Palestinian guerrilla groups which were formally separate to the PLO. These new groups were a radical innovation, as the PLO had been the creation of the Arab League, and a "means of putting off rather than precipitating a showdown with Israel."<sup>8</sup>

Linked to the failure of alternative strategies, the changing demographics of the Algerian and Palestinian leadership were also important in the resort to armed conflict. In comparison to interwar leaders, post-1945 Algerian activists,

<sup>3</sup> John Ruedy, *Modern Algeria* (Bloomington: Indiana Press, 1992), 156.

<sup>4</sup> Alistair Horne, *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria, 1954-1962* (London: Macmillan, 1977), 571.

<sup>5</sup> Ruedy, *Modern Algeria*, 176.

<sup>6</sup> Douglas Little "The Cold War in the Middle East: Suez to the Camp David Accords," in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War Volume 2: Crises and Détente*, ed. Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 324.

<sup>7</sup> Malcolm Kerr, *The Arab Cold War: Gamal Abd al-Nasir and his Rivals, 1958-1970* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), 54.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 151-154.

especially those in the FLN, were generally younger, poorer, and thus had “less of a stake culturally or economically in the colonial regime than the political activists that preceded them.”<sup>9</sup> Similarly in the Palestinian case, Rashid Khalidi observes that the older Palestinian elite families such as the al-Husaynis, Nashashibis and al-Khalidis were largely excluded from the emerging guerrilla movement, and the new movements’ leaders were often graduates of the Beirut, Cairo, and Damascus universities.<sup>10</sup> Ilan Pappé also notes that the majority of Fatah members between 1959 and 1964 were either university students or recent graduates, suggesting that new organisations were primarily made up of those with few stakes in the existing system.<sup>11</sup> Whilst the failure of alternative strategies, and the changing demographics of resistance movements help explain the shift to political violence as a means of pressurising France and Israel to withdraw; this only explains why conflict characterised revolutionary politics. In order to explain why these organisations chose terrorism over other forms of conflict, this paper will next discuss the political, military, and general resource imbalance between French and Algerian guerrilla organisations, and Israeli and Palestinian guerrilla organisations.

The resource asymmetries suggested above are crucial in explaining the rise of terrorism rather than conventional confrontation. As victory through conventional military means was effectively impossible, Algerian and Palestinian actors turned to guerrilla and terrorist tactics in their struggles against imperialism.<sup>12</sup> The 1967 defeat effectively confirmed Israel’s military superiority over the Arab states, signalling the end of any conventional attempts to defeat Israel through war. Whilst 1967 can be interpreted as a moment of liberation for Palestinian guerrilla organisations, it must be understood in the context of massive conventional military failure. Similarly, Algerian guerrilla organisations were confronted with the dilemma of facing greater French military strength, a powerful settler colonial lobby, and fighting in urban territory that favoured the French. Resource asymmetry was an essential precondition that led Algerian and Palestinian actors to choose guerrilla and terrorist methods over conventional armed conflict. However, the factors cited so far only created incentives for organisations to adopt terrorist methods, and cannot account for their persistence. Terrorism’s utility for guerrilla organisations aiming to establish themselves as dominant, create recruits, and internationalise decolonisation struggles best explains its endurance, as this paper will analyse next.

Terrorism had a political credibility function, which allowed competing guerrilla organisations to assert their radicalism, and claim to be the sole legitimate representative of the people on whose behalf they claimed to act on. Terrorist attacks between Algerian and Palestinian organisations can be interpreted as part of a struggle between competing organisations to represent respective constituencies. This logic offers a compelling explanation in the Palestinian case because Fatah, the first Palestinian organisation to carry out small-scale violent strikes, self-consciously did so to establish its credibility against the Arab League dominated and recognised PLO. Fatah was

<sup>9</sup> Ruedy, *Modern Algeria*, 157.

<sup>10</sup> Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 180.

<sup>11</sup> Ilan Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, 2006), 164.

<sup>12</sup> Matthew Connolly, “Rethinking the Cold War and Decolonization: The Grand Strategy of the Algerian War for Independence,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 33, no. 2 (2001): 222.

additionally in competition with over 40 groups prioritising the fight for Palestinian self-determination.<sup>13</sup> Between 1965 and 1967, Fatah carried out 100 attacks in which it killed eleven and injured 62 Israelis, a clear attempt to assert its legitimacy above other groups which prioritised social revolution and Arab nationalism over the Palestinian cause.<sup>14</sup> The initial aircraft hijackings of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) could also be interpreted as a “competition for recruits.”<sup>15</sup>

A similar logic initially animated terrorism in the Algerian case – the first years of the Algerian War were marked as much by Algerian civil war, as they were by struggle against the French. Inter-organisational terrorist attacks were so pervasive that John Ruedy estimates the FLN killed one European for every six Algerians, between 1954 and 1956.<sup>16</sup> The infamous ‘Café Wars’ between the FLN and MNA are estimated to have cost around five thousand lives, as both organisations vied to establish a monopoly over the nationalist movement. Terrorism proved useful as a mechanism to establish guerrilla organisations’ credibility, which explains the endurance of competing terror acts between Palestinian guerrilla factions such as Fatah, the PFLP, and the Black September Organization.

The logic behind the use of terrorism as a way of generating mass mobilisation is more complex. Terrorist attacks carried out by guerrilla organisations normally provoked non-specific communal punishment, which helped delegitimise France and Israel in the eyes of ordinary Algerians and Palestinians. In the Algerian case, terrorist violence heightened intercommunal violence and accelerated mass mobilisation. The August 1955 Philippeville massacres, for example, saw the FLN kill civilian French settlers, intensifying polarisation and arbitrary retaliations between the two communities. Although the figures are disputed, Eugene Rogan notes that even the lower French estimate acknowledges killing 1200 Algerian civilians in retaliation against the Philippeville massacres.<sup>17</sup> Arbitrary retaliations created a fertile recruiting ground for the insurgents: John Ruedy estimates that this increased the number of FLN recruits in ‘Wilaya Two’, the FLN-district in which Philippeville was located, from 200 to 1400 men.<sup>18</sup> Provocatively, Rogan even claims that these tactics changed “the small FLN insurgency of 1954 [...] into total war by the end of 1955.”<sup>19</sup> Ruedy highlights that the same dynamics made many of the previously moderate Algerian political class “turn revolutionary”: several innocent MTLD Algerian centralists joined the FLN after arrest and torture between 1954 and 1957.<sup>20</sup>

Similarly, Abou Iyad (also known as Salah Khalaf), the second most senior Fatah official to Yasser Arafat, recalled that Fatah recruits increased substantially after the 1968 ‘heroic military defeat’ at Karameh. Iyad’s claim is supported by the increased number of Fatah attacks, which he claims rose from a monthly average of 12 (1967) to 279 (1970).<sup>21</sup> Rogan corroborates this, noting that 5000 volunteers were rumoured to have joined Fatah after Karameh,

<sup>13</sup> Wendy Pearlman, “The Palestinian National Movement,” in *The June 1967 War: Origins and Consequences* ed. Wm Roger Louis and Avi Shlaim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 128.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>15</sup> Charles D. Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2001), 310.

<sup>16</sup> Ruedy, *Modern Algeria*, 164.

<sup>17</sup> Eugene Rogan, *The Arabs: A History* (London: Penguin Books, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, 2011), 405.

<sup>18</sup> Ruedy, *Modern Algeria*, 162.

<sup>19</sup> Rogan, *The Arabs: A History.*, 406.

<sup>20</sup> Ruedy, *Modern Algeria*, 161.

<sup>21</sup> Abou Iyad, *My Home, My Land: A Narrative of the Palestinian Struggle* (New York: Times Books, 1981), 60.

and the number of annual Fatah operations increased annually from 55 (1968), to 199 (1969), to 279 (1970).<sup>22</sup> Thus, terrorism proved a useful method to generate recruits for guerrilla organisations: Martin Evans succinctly summarises this logic, arguing that the FLNs strategy of “pulling the trigger and letting the French react [...] unleashed a process of violence that would ultimately force the Algerian population full-square behind the FLN.”<sup>23</sup>

Perhaps most importantly, terrorism was used to help internationalise the Algerian and Palestinian decolonisation struggles, which Matthew Connelly and Ilan Pappé have convincingly argued was essential in achieving decolonisation.<sup>24</sup> As discussed previously, Arab guerrilla organisations had no chance of succeeding militarily and hence aimed at internationalising their struggles. Internationalisation offered guerrilla organisations the chance to increase their resources from foreign patrons, and garner the sympathy of the international community, which they hoped would pressure France and Israel into conceding to their demands. Connelly notes that the FLNs grand strategy was to use urban terror to attract foreign media attention, and the correlation between FLN diplomacy and the frequency of terrorist attacks and French retaliation supports his argument.<sup>25</sup> As early as April 1955, the FLN sent delegates to the nonaligned countries’ Bandung conference, which – through FLN persuasion – unanimously adopted an Egyptian resolution proclaiming support for Algerian independence.<sup>26</sup> Contemporaneous British records have revealed that the FLN were distributing pamphlets calling for people to support a campaign to prevent FLN members Djamilia Bouhired and Djamilia Bouazza’s executions as far as India – internationalisation appears to have been the FLN’s central strategy.<sup>27</sup>

Similarly, Fatah, the PLO and PFLP aimed to internationalise the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with notable successes. American President Jimmy Carter acknowledged the existence of “a Palestinian homeland” in 1973, and Yasser Arafat, the leader of Fatah, was able to address the United Nations (UN) in 1974.<sup>28</sup> The UN subsequently gave the PLO observer status on November 10<sup>th</sup> 1975, under General Assembly resolution 3237 and “reaffirmed the [Palestinian] right to national independence and sovereignty” in resolution 3236.<sup>29</sup> Revealingly, Abou Iyad justified Fatah’s violence as “the only way to impose the Palestinian cause on world opinion,” suggesting that internationalising the conflict was the primary aim of terrorist violence.<sup>30</sup>

Terrorism provoked harsh retaliatory, often seemingly arbitrary, punishment, which generated international awareness and support for guerrilla organisations, as well as weakening support for imperialism (and occupation) within France and Israel. In France, despite its ban, Henri Alleg’s ‘La Question’ sold 60,000 copies in two weeks and shocked public opinion, persuading many that the human costs of imperialism were unjustifiable. Alleg’s account was particularly controversial because torture was illegal under article 302 of the

<sup>22</sup> Rogan, *The Arabs: A History*, 436.

<sup>23</sup> Martin Evans, *Algeria: France’s Undeclared War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 225.

<sup>24</sup> Connelly, “Rethinking the Cold War”; Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine*.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 222-225.

<sup>26</sup> Ruedy, *Modern Algeria*, 165.

<sup>27</sup> Natalya Vince, “Transgressing Boundaries: Gender, Race, Religion and “françaises musulmanes” during the Algerian War of Independence,” *French Historical Studies*, 33 no. 3 (Summer 2010), 454.

<sup>28</sup> Colin Shindler, *A History of Modern Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 155.

<sup>29</sup> United Nations General Assembly Resolution 3236: Question of Palestine, Last accessed 11<sup>th</sup> March, [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/3237\(XXIX\)&Lang=E&Area=RESOLUTION](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/3237(XXIX)&Lang=E&Area=RESOLUTION),

<sup>30</sup> Abu Iyad, *My Home, My Land*, 30.

French penal code. Internationally, the French indiscriminate bombing of Sakiët, a Tunisian-Algerian border town, in 1958 caused a major scandal when it resulted in the deaths of several Tunisian civilians, further alienating France internationally and leading western states to pressure France to grant Algeria independence. American president Dwight Eisenhower even threatened to cut US loans to France, unless France accepted US officers' presence to offer advice on their Algerian strategy.<sup>31</sup> To use a more local example, the FLN assassination of the mayor of Boufarik, a town near Algiers, in December 1956 prompted French settlers to sporadically attack Algerian civilians at his funeral. Martin Evans estimates that this led to the death and injury of 56 Algerians, prompting international criticism and shaping French public opinion against continued French imperialism in Algeria.<sup>32</sup>

Significantly, internationalisation strategies also appear to have had positive results, which probably incentivised the continued use of terrorism to provoke internationally controversial retaliations. Before Charles de Gaulle came to power in June 1958, influential US Senator John Kennedy spoke in favour of Algerian independence, and in April 1958, Algerian football players in the French league left for Tunis in order to form a national (FLN-endorsed) squad.<sup>33</sup> Similarly in the Palestinian case, Israeli reactions provoked international condemnation, inverting earlier international perceptions of Israel as morally legitimate but militarily weak. The language guerrilla organisations used further highlights their strategy of appealing to potentially powerful international patrons. When addressing the UN in 1974, Arafat made repeated comparisons between the aims of the PLO and iconic US presidents, including Washington, Lincoln and Wilson, most likely in an attempt to legitimise the PLO with American policymakers and the broader American public.<sup>34</sup> Through terrorist attacks, revolutionary Algerian and Palestinian guerrilla organisations brought decolonisation struggles into international consciousness, often exposing the hypocrisy of French and Israeli narratives, as their retaliatory actions were noted, and criticised, in a global arena. The French could no longer plausibly claim to be carrying out a civilising mission, and the right-wing Israeli narrative that "there was no such thing as Palestinians [...] they did not exist" was seriously undermined.<sup>35</sup>

This paper has so far endorsed the view that the resort to terrorism in the revolutionary Algerian and Palestinian politics of the 1950-70s can be explained with reference to the longer historical context, and political and strategic functions that terrorism served for guerrilla organisations. However, this interpretation may be challenged with Frantz Fanon's argument that terrorist methods are better explained as a psychological and "moral impulse to murder [that stem from] the natives' collective unconsciousness."<sup>36</sup> Fanon, a psychologist and member of the FLN, argued that colonialism was a binary, violent relationship where "the settler never ceases to be the enemy" and hence, colonised men can only "find [their] freedom in and through violence."<sup>37</sup> The French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, who had close links to Fanon, even

<sup>31</sup> Evans, *France's Undeclared War*, 233.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.

<sup>34</sup> Shindler, *Modern Israel*, 203.

<sup>35</sup> "Golda Meir," British Broadcasting Corporation, accessed 11<sup>th</sup> March 2014, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/events/israel\\_at\\_50/profiles/81288.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/events/israel_at_50/profiles/81288.stm)

<sup>36</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 65.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

asserted that European attempts to negotiate or grant independence peacefully were fruitless because allowing “natives to slowly join the exclusive club [of western civilisation]” denies them their opportunity to assert their humanity through violence, in his preface to *Wretched of the Earth*.<sup>38</sup> In short, according to Fanon and Sartre, “the natives don’t give a damn about their [European and international] support.”<sup>39</sup>

However, this argument now appears problematic because high-ranking officials in Algerian and Palestinian guerrilla organisations appear to have understood terrorist and violent tactics to have political and strategic functions. Martin Evans cites an FLN directive which stated that “a bomb causing the death of ten people and wounding fifty others is the psychological equivalent of the loss of a French battalion,” highlighting that terrorism was seen as a means to an end, rather than an end itself.<sup>40</sup> In 1956, Hocine Aït Ahmed, at the time a high-ranking FLN official, recorded in his diary that “the more [the FLN] push the US to associate itself with [French] colonialism [...] the closer will be the day when [the French] will see themselves obliged to bail out.”<sup>41</sup>

It is of course possible that terrorism had a psychologically purifying, redemptive aspect for fedayeen activists as several authors have noted. As Palestine was effectively wiped off the map in 1967, Helen Cobban argues that political violence “re-established Palestinian national identity.”<sup>42</sup> Nonetheless, this interpretation is inconsistent with the evidence we have of high-ranking officials’ decisions not to condemn, but to justify and encourage, the use of terror. At least in the view of political elites within the main Algerian and Palestinian guerrilla organisations, terrorism was more strategically useful than an imperative emotional action. As explaining the motives of political elites is more important than those of lower-level recruits, given the control the higher-ranks had over political strategy, it is reasonable to explain Algerian and Palestinian terrorism in terms of its political and strategic functions. Whilst terrorism had important social and symbolic functions, this doesn’t explain how terrorism came to characterise the revolutionary politics of Algeria and Palestine: the evidence we now have about high-rank guerrilla officials’ decisions to use terrorist methods suggests that it had more important political and strategic functions.

Finally, it is worth noting that explaining revolutionary terrorism in Algeria and Palestine is not equivalent to suggesting that terrorism was a unanimously supported, or all-pervasive, phenomena in 1950s-70s Algeria and Palestine. This is in contrast to the predictions of orientalist accounts of political violence explained in terms of religion and culture, which are claimed to affect all Arabs or Muslims equally. Whilst the emergence of terrorism can be argued to have been the most distinctive and important shift in revolutionary Arab politics, terrorists never numbered more than a minority. In the Palestinian case, Pappé observes that many Palestinians immigrated to the wealthier oil states to get a better quality of life, and a large number didn’t participate in resistance – many Palestinian traders were more willing to accept the Israeli occupiers than Arafat would have preferred. Pappé’s estimates suggest that Palestinians in the post-

<sup>38</sup> Jean Paul Sartre, “Preface,” in *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 30.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>40</sup> Evans, *France’s Undeclared War*, 201-202.

<sup>41</sup> Connelly, “Rethinking the Cold War,” 226.

<sup>42</sup> Pearlman, “The Palestinian National Movement,” 125; Helena Cobban, *The Palestinian Liberation Organisation: People, Power and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 245.



1967 occupied territories made up one-quarter of the Israeli labour force in 1970, including substantial numbers in the construction and agricultural workforces. Although many suffered prejudice and wage discrimination, they offered at best tacit support to Palestinian guerrilla organisations and their daily lives were largely a “mixture of daily survival, and adaptation.”<sup>43</sup> Mouloud Feraoun, an Algerian writer and teacher from Kabylie, offers a comparable account of popular participation in the Algerian revolution. Feraoun’s account of the conflict implied that many Algerians, particularly in rural areas, mainly suffered and endured the war, rather than actively participated in it. Feraoun described soldiers on both sides “behaving as if they were in a free brothel,” and grimly summarised that “whether it is the army or the marquis, it tightens and tightens, it violates, and it kills,” painting a violent picture of desperate survival, rather than ‘revolutionary unanimity’ in favour of terrorist methods.<sup>44</sup> Feraoun further suggests that most Algerian tacit support for the FLN was motivated out of fear, rather than real support. Noting that terrorism was confined to a relatively small minority throws doubt on the orientalist argument that Arab or Islamic culture somehow explains the adoption and continued use of terrorist tactics.

Algerian and Palestinian guerrilla movements’ resort to terrorism is best explained with reference to the failure of alternative strategies and the asymmetric resource balance between Algeria and France, and Israel and Palestine. Algerian and Palestinian terrorism was then continued due to its usefulness as part of guerrilla organisations’ broader strategic and international goals. Whilst Fanon’s thesis that violence, including terrorism, allows “the colonized man to find his freedom” potentially holds some merit in explaining the motivations of lower-level actors within guerrilla organisations, his argument doesn’t explain the motivations of high-rank officials.<sup>45</sup> In fact, written evidence from high-ranking officials suggests that terrorist tactics were adopted and used more frequently after they had been shown to be effective in getting the attention and support of the international community. Ultimately, terrorism’s role in the revolutionary politics of Algeria and Palestine is best understood as a political strategy that aimed to further internationalise decolonization conflicts. Terrorist tactics were used in a specific and targeted way; they were not simply irrational violence, or an inevitable “cleansing force [that] freed the native from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction,” as more simplistic accounts have argued.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Pappé, *Modern History of Palestine*, 189-204.

<sup>44</sup> Mouloud Feraoun, *Journal 1955-1962: Reflections on the French-Algerian War* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 261-270.

<sup>45</sup> Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 68.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.



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