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In deeply prejudiced fashion, commentators who explain the September 11 attacks by referring to a "clash of civilizations" assume that terrorism is somehow an authentic expression of the predominant values of Islam. But the common responses to this interpretation do not adequately explain the theology of radical Islamist groups. None of these perspectives engage the classical tradition in Islamic thought regarding political violence, and how contemporary Muslims reconstruct the classical tradition. How might classical or contemporary Islamic theology contribute to the use of terrorism by modern Islamic movements?

Since the early 1980s, commentators have argued that Islam is suffering a crisis of identity, as the crumbling of Islamic civilization in the modern age has left Muslims with a profound sense of alienation and injury. Challenges confronting Muslim nations—failures of development projects, entrenched authoritarian regimes and the inability to respond effectively to Israeli belligerence—have induced deep-seated frustration and anger that, in turn, contributed to the rise of fundamentalist movements, or as most commentators have preferred to say, political Islam. But most commentators have been caught off guard by the ferocity of the acts of mass murder recently committed in New York and Washington. The basic cruelty and moral depravity of these attacks came as a shock not only to non-Muslims, but to Muslims as well.

The extreme political violence we call terrorism is not a simple aberration unrelated to the political dynamics of a society. Generally, terrorism is the quintessential crime of those who feel powerless seeking to undermine the perceived power of a targeted group. Like many crimes of power, terrorism is also a hate crime, for it relies on a polarized rhetoric of belligerence toward a particular group that is demonized to the point of being denied any moral worth. To recruit and communicate effectively, this rhetoric of belligerence needs to tap into and exploit an already radicalized discourse with the expectation of resonating with the social and political frustrations of a people. If acts of terrorism find little resonance within a society, such acts and their ideological defenders are marginalized. But if these acts do find a degree of resonance, terrorism becomes incrementally more acute and severe, and its ideological justifications become progressively more radical.

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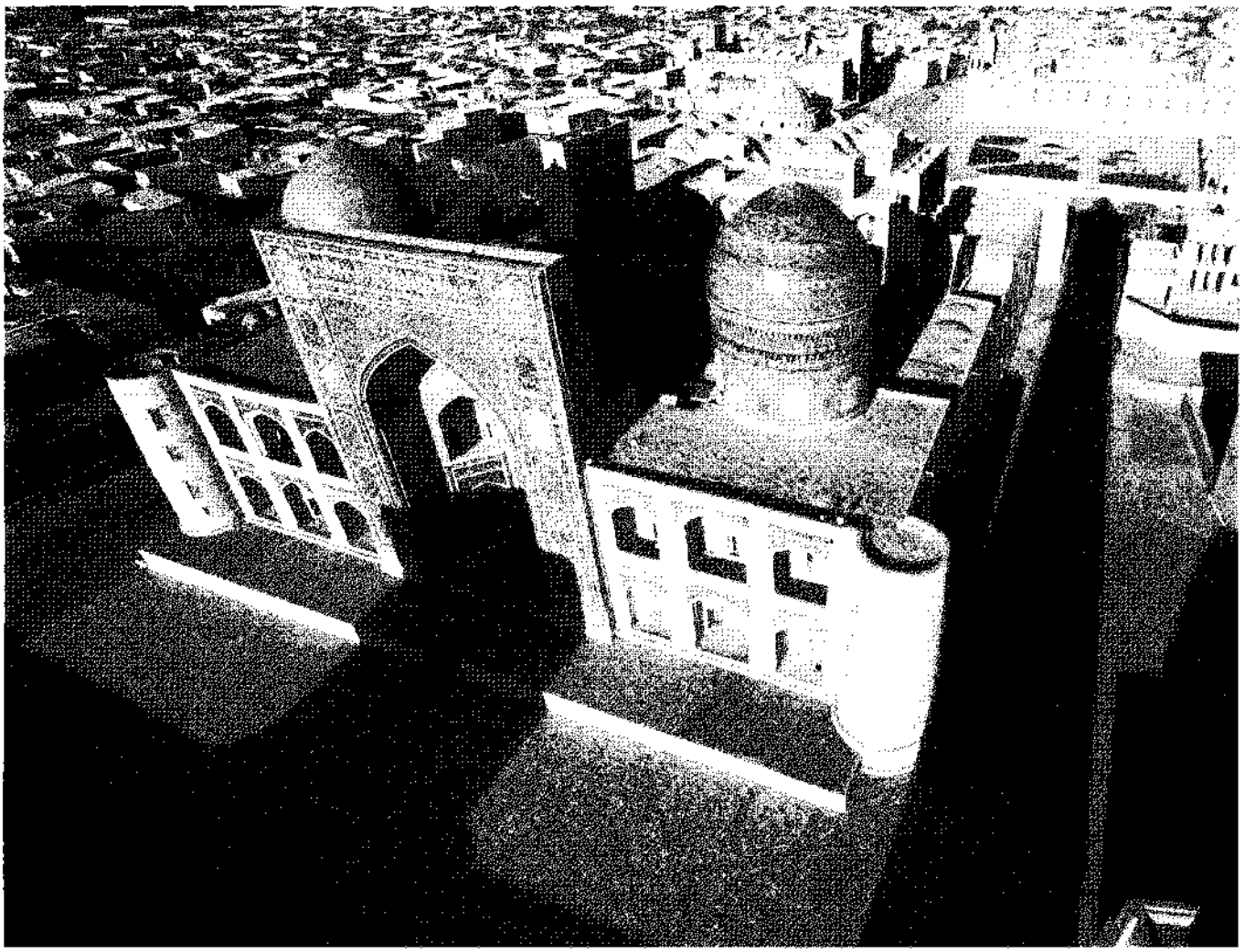
Asking Why

To what extent are the September 11 attacks in the US symptomatic of more pervasive ideological undercurrents in the Muslim world today? Obviously, not all social or political frustrations lead to the use of violence. While national liberation movements often resort to violence, the recent attacks are set apart from such movements. The perpetrators did not seem to be acting on behalf of an ethnic group or nation. They presented no specific territorial claims or political agenda, and were not keen to claim responsibility for their acts. One can speculate that the perpetrators' list of grievances included persistent Israeli abuses of Palestinians, near-daily bombings of Iraq and the presence of American troops in the Gulf, but the fact remains that the attacks were not followed by a list of demands or even a set of articulated goals. The attacks exhibit a profound sense of frustration and extreme despair, rather than a struggle to achieve clear-cut objectives.

Some commentators have viewed the underpinnings of the recent attacks as part of a "clash of civilizations" between Western values and Islamic culture. According to these commentators, the issue is not religious fundamentalism or political Islam, but an essential conflict between competing visions of morality and ethics. From this perspective, it is hardly surprising that the terrorists do not present concrete demands, do not have specific territorial objectives and do not rush to take responsibility. The September 11 attacks



Mir-i-Arab Madrasa towers over Bukhara, Uzbekistan. BURHAN OZBILICI/AP PHOTO

aimed to strike at the symbols of Western civilization, and to challenge its perceived hegemony, in the hope of empowering and reinvigorating Islamic civilization.

The "clash of civilizations" approach assumes, in deeply prejudiced fashion, that puritanism and terrorism are somehow authentic expressions of the predominant values of the Islamic tradition, and hence is a dangerous interpretation of the present moment. But the common responses to this interpretation, focusing on either the crisis of identity or acute social frustration in the Muslim world, do not adequately explain the theological positions adopted by radical Islamist groups, or how extreme violence can be legitimated in the modern age. Further, none of these perspectives engage the classical tradition in Islamic thought regarding the employment of political violence, and how contemporary Muslims reconstruct the classical tradition. How might the classical or contemporary doctrines of Islamic theology contribute to the use of terrorism by modern Islamic movements?

Classical Islamic Law and Political Violence

By the eleventh century, Muslim jurists had developed a sophisticated discourse on the proper limits on the conduct of warfare, political violence and terrorism. The Qur'an exhorted Muslims in general terms to perform *jihad* by waging war against their enemies. The Qur'anic prescriptions simply call upon Muslims to fight in the way of God, establish justice and refrain from exceeding the limits of justice in fighting their enemies. Muslim jurists, reflecting their historical circumstances and context, tended to divide the world into three conceptual categories: the abode of Islam, the abode of war and the abode of peace or non-belligerence. These were not clear or precise categories, but generally they connoted territories belonging to Muslims, territories belonging to enemies and territories considered neutral or non-hostile for one reason or another. But Muslim jurists could not agree on exactly how to define the abode of Muslims versus the abode of others, especially when sectarian divisions within Islam were involved, and when dealing with conquered Muslim territories or territories where sizable Muslim minorities resided.[1] Furthermore, Muslim jurists disagreed on the legal cause for fighting non-Muslims. Some contended that non-Muslims are to be fought because they are infidels, while the majority argued that non-Muslims should be fought only if they pose a danger to Muslims. The majority of early jurists argued that a treaty of non-aggression between Muslims and non-Muslims ought to be limited to a ten-year term. Nonetheless, after the tenth century an increasing number of jurists argued that such treaties could be renewed indefinitely, or be of permanent or indefinite duration.[2]

Importantly, Muslim jurists did not focus on the idea of just cause for war. Other than emphasizing that if Muslim territory is attacked, Muslims must fight back, the jurists seemed to relegate the decision to make war or peace to political authorities. There is a considerable body of legal writing prohibiting Muslim rulers from violating treaties, indulging in treachery or attacking an enemy without first giving notice, but the literature on the conditions that warrant a *jihad* is sparse. It is not that the classical jurists believed that war is always justified or appropriate; rather, they seemed to assume that the decision to wage war is fundamentally political. However, the methods of war were the subject of a substantial jurisprudential discourse.

Building upon the proscriptions of the Prophet Muhammad, Muslim jurists insisted that there are legal restrictions upon the conduct of war. In general, Muslim armies may not kill women, children, seniors, hermits, pacifists, peasants or slaves unless they are combatants. Vegetation and property may not be destroyed, water holes may not be poisoned, and flame-throwers may not be used unless out of necessity, and even then only to a limited extent. Torture, mutilation and murder of hostages were forbidden under all circumstances. Importantly, the classical jurists reached these determinations not simply as a matter of textual interpretation, but as moral or ethical assertions. The classical jurists spoke from the vantage point of a moral civilization, in other words, from a perspective that betrayed a strong sense of confidence in the normative message of Islam. In contrast to their pragmatism regarding whether a war should be waged, the classical jurists accepted the necessity of moral constraints upon the way war is conducted.

An Offense Against God and Society

Muslim jurists exhibited a remarkable tolerance toward the idea of political rebellion. Because of historical circumstances in the first three centuries of Islam, Muslim jurists, in principle, prohibited rebellions even against unjust rulers. At the same time, they refused to give the government unfettered discretion against rebels. The classical jurists argued that the law of God prohibited the execution of rebels or needless destruction or confiscation of their property. Rebels should not be tortured or even imprisoned if they take an oath promising to abandon their rebellion. Most importantly, according to the majority point of view, rebellion, for a plausible cause, is not a sin or moral infraction, but merely a political wrong because of the chaos and civil strife that result. This approach effectively made political rebellion a civil, and not a religious, infraction.

The classical juristic approach to terrorism was quite different. Since the very first century of Islam, Muslims suffered from extremist theologies that not only rejected the political institutions of the Islamic empire, but also refused to concede legiti-

macy to the juristic class. Although not organized in a church or a single institutional structure, the juristic class in Islam had clear and distinctive insignia of investiture. They attended particular colleges, received training in a particular methodology of juristic inquiry, and developed a specialized technical language, the mastery of which became the gateway to inclusion.

Significantly, the juristic class engaged as a rule in discussion and debate. On each point of law, there are ten different opinions and a considerable amount of debate among the various legal schools of thought. Various puritan theological movements in Islamic history resolutely rejected this juristic tradition, which reveled in indeterminacy. The hallmark of these puritan movements was an intolerant theology displaying extreme hostility not only to non-Muslims but also to Muslims who belonged to different schools of thought or even remained neutral. These movements considered opponents and indifferent Muslims to have exited the fold of Islam, and therefore legitimate targets of violence. These groups' preferred methods of violence were stealth attacks and the dissemination of terror in the general population.

Muslim jurists reacted sharply to these groups, considering them enemies of humankind. They were designated as *muharibs* (literally, those who fight society). A *muharib* was defined as someone who attacks defenseless victims by stealth, and spreads terror in society. They were not to be given quarter or refuge by anyone or at any place. In fact, Muslim jurists argued that any Muslim or non-Muslim territory sheltering such a group is hostile territory that may be attacked by the mainstream Islamic forces. Although the classical jurists agreed on the definition of a *muharib*, they disagreed about which types of criminal acts should be considered crimes of terror. Many jurists classified rape, armed robbery, assassinations, arson and murder by poisoning as crimes of terror and argued that such crimes must be punished vigorously regardless of the motivations of the criminal. Most importantly, these doctrines were asserted as religious imperatives. Regardless of the desired goals or ideological justifications, the terrorizing of the defenseless was recognized as a moral wrong and an offense against society and God.

Demise of the Classical Tradition

It is often stated that terrorism is the weapon of the weak. Notably, classical juristic discourse was developed when Islamic civilization was supreme, and this supremacy was reflected in the benevolent attitude of the juristic class. Pre-modern Muslim juristic discourses navigated a course between principled thinking and real-life pragmatic concerns and demands. Ultimately, these jurists spoke with a sense of urgency, but not desperation. Power and political supremacy were not their sole pursuits.

Much has changed in the modern age. Islamic civilization has crumbled, and the traditional institutions that once sustained the juristic discourse have all but vanished. The moral foundations that once mapped out Islamic law and theology have disintegrated, leaving an unsettling vacuum. More to the point, the juristic discourses on tolerance towards rebellion and hostility to the use of terror are no longer part of the normative categories of contemporary Muslims. Contemporary Muslim discourses either give lip service to the classical doctrines without a sense of commitment or ignore and neglect them all together.

There are many factors that contributed to this modern reality. Among the pertinent factors is the undeniably traumatic experience of colonialism, which dismantled the traditional institutions of civil society. The emergence of highly centralized, despotic and often corrupt governments, and the nationalization of the institutions of religious learning undermined the mediating role of jurists in Muslim societies. Nearly all charitable religious endowments became state-controlled entities, and Muslim jurists in most Muslim nations became salaried state employees, effectively transforming them into what may be called "court priests." The establishment of the state of Israel, the expulsion of the Palestinians and the persistent military conflicts in which Arab states suffered heavy losses all contributed to a widespread siege mentality and a highly polarized and belligerent political discourse. Perhaps most importantly, Western cultural symbols, modes of production and social values aggressively penetrated the Muslim world, seriously challenging inherited values and practices, and adding to a profound sense of alienation.

Two developments became particularly relevant to the withering away of Islamic jurisprudence. Most Muslim nations experienced the wholesale borrowing of civil law concepts. Instead of the dialectical and indeterminate methodology of traditional Islamic jurisprudence, Muslim nations opted for more centralized and often code-based systems of law. Even Muslim modernists who attempted to reform Islamic jurisprudence were heavily influenced by the civil law system, and sought to resist the fluidity of Islamic law and increase its unitary and centralized character. Not only were the concepts of law heavily influenced by the European legal tradition, the ideologies of resistance employed by Muslims were laden with Third World notions of national liberation and self-determination. For instance, modern nationalistic thought exercised a greater influence on the resistance ideologies of Muslim and Arab national liberation movements than anything in the Islamic tradition. The Islamic tradition was reconstructed to fit Third World nationalistic ideologies of anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism rather than the other way around.

While national liberation movements—such as the Palestinian or Algerian resistance—resorted to guerrilla or non-conventional warfare, modern day terrorism of the variety promoted by Osama bin Laden is rooted in a different ideological paradigm. There is little doubt that organizations such as the Jihad, al-Qaeda, Hizb al-Tahrir and Jama'at al-Muslimin were influenced by national liberation and anti-colonialist ideologies, but they have anchored themselves in a theology that can be described as puritan, supremacist and thoroughly opportunistic. This theology is the byproduct of the emergence and eventual dominance of Wahhabism, Salafism and apologetic discourses in modern Islam.

Contemporary Puritan Islam

The foundations of Wahhabi theology were put in place by the eighteenth-century evangelist Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab in the Arabian Peninsula. With a puritanical zeal, 'Abd al-Wahhab sought to rid Islam of corruptions that he believed had crept into the religion. Wahhabism resisted the indeterminacy of the modern age by escaping to a strict literalism in which the text became the sole source of legitimacy. In this context, Wahhabism exhibited extreme hostility to intellectualism, mysticism and any sectarian divisions within Islam. The Wahhabi creed also considered any form of moral thought that was not entirely dependent on the text as a form of self-idolatry, and treated humanistic fields of knowledge, especially philosophy, as "the sciences of the devil." According to the Wahhabi creed, it was imperative to return to a presumed pristine, simple and straightforward Islam, which could be entirely reclaimed by literal implementation of the commands of the Prophet, and by strict adherence to correct ritual practice. Importantly, Wahhabism rejected any attempt to interpret the divine law from a historical, contextual perspective, and treated the vast majority of Islamic history as a corruption of the true and authentic Islam. The classical jurisprudential tradition was considered at best to be mere sophistry. Wahhabism became very intolerant of the long-established Islamic practice of considering a variety of schools of thought to be equally orthodox. Orthodoxy was narrowly defined, and 'Abd al-Wahhab himself was fond of creating long lists of beliefs and acts which he considered hypocritical, the adoption or commission of which immediately rendered a Muslim an unbeliever.

In the late eighteenth century, the Al Sa'ud family united with the Wahhabi movement and rebelled against Ottoman rule in Arabia. Egyptian forces quashed this rebellion in 1818. Nevertheless, Wahhabi ideology was resuscitated in the early twentieth century under the leadership of 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn Sa'ud who allied himself with the tribes of Najd, in the beginnings of what would become Saudi Arabia. The Wahhabi rebellions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were very bloody because the Wahhabis indiscriminately slaughtered and terrorized Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Mainstream jurists writing at the time, such as the Hanafi Ibn 'Abidin and the Maliki al-Sawi, described the Wahhabis as a fanatic fringe group.[3]

Wahhabism Ascendant

Nevertheless, Wahhabism survived and, in fact, thrived in contemporary Islam for several reasons. By treating Muslim Ottoman rule as a foreign occupying power, Wahhabism set a powerful precedent for notions of Arab self-determination and autonomy. In advocating a return to the pristine and pure origins of Islam, Wahhabism rejected the cumulative weight of historical baggage. This idea was intuitively liberating for Muslim reformers since it meant the rebirth of *ijtihad*, or the return to de novo examination and determination of legal issues unencumbered by the accretions of precedents and inherited doctrines. Most importantly, the discovery and exploitation of oil provided Saudi Arabia with high liquidity. Especially after 1975, with the sharp rise in oil prices, Saudi Arabia aggressively promoted Wahhabi thought around the Muslim world. Even a cursory examination of predominant ideas and practices reveals the widespread influence of Wahhabi thought on the Muslim world today.

But Wahhabism did not spread in the modern Muslim world under its own banner. Even the term "Wahhabism" is considered derogatory by its adherents, since Wahhabis prefer to see themselves as the representatives of Islamic orthodoxy. To them, Wahhabism is not a school of thought within Islam, but *is* Islam. The fact that Wahhabism rejected a label gave it a diffuse quality, making many of its doctrines and methodologies eminently transferable. Wahhabi thought exercised its greatest influence not under its own label, but under the rubric of Salafism. In their literature, Wahhabi clerics have consistently described themselves as *Salafis*, and not Wahhabis.

Beset with Contradictions

Salafism is a creed founded in the late nineteenth century by Muslim reformers such as Muhammad 'Abduh, al-Afghani and Rashid Rida. Salafism appealed to a very basic concept in Islam: Muslims ought to follow the precedent of the Prophet and his companions (*al-salaf al-salih*). Methodologically, Salafism was nearly identical to Wahhabism except that Wahhabism is far less tolerant of diversity and differences of opinion. The founders of Salafism maintained that on all issues Muslims ought to return to the Qur'an and the *sunna* (precedent) of the Prophet. In doing so, Muslims ought to reinterpret the original sources in light of modern needs and demands, without being slavishly bound to the interpretations of earlier Muslim generations.

As originally conceived, Salafism was not necessarily anti-intellectual, but like Wahhabism, it did tend to be uninterested in history. By emphasizing a presumed golden age in Islam, the adherents of Salafism idealized the time of the Prophet and his companions, and ignored or demonized the balance of Islamic history. By rejecting juristic precedents and undervaluing tradition, Salafism adopted a form of egalitarianism that deconstructed any notions of established authority within Islam. Effectively, anyone was considered qualified to return to the original sources and speak for the divine will. By liberating Muslims from the tradition of the jurists, Salafism contributed to a real vacuum of authority in contemporary Islam. Importantly, Salafism was founded by Muslim nationalists who were eager to read the values of modernism into the original sources of Islam. Hence, Salafism was not necessarily anti-Western. In fact, its founders strove to project contemporary institutions such as democracy, constitutions or socialism into the foundational texts, and to justify the modern nation-state within Islam.

The liberal age of Salafism came to an end in the 1960s. After 1975, Wahhabism was able to rid itself of its extreme intolerance, and proceeded to coopt Salafism until the two became practically indistinguishable. Both theologies imagined a golden age within Islam, entailing a belief in a histori-

cal utopia that can be reproduced in contemporary Islam. Both remained uninterested in critical historical inquiry and responded to the challenge of modernity by escaping to the secure haven of the text. Both advocated a form of egalitarianism and anti-elitism to the point that they came to consider intellectualism and rational moral insight to be inaccessible and, thus, corruptions of the purity of the Islamic message. Wahhabism and Salafism were beset with contradictions that made them simultaneously idealistic and pragmatic and infested both creeds (especially in the 1980s and 1990s) with a kind of supremacist thinking that prevails until today.

Between Apologetics and Supremacy

The predominant intellectual response to the challenge of modernity in Islam has been apologetics. Apologetics consisted of an effort by a large number of commentators to defend the Islamic system of beliefs from the onslaught of Orientalism, Westernization and modernity by simultaneously emphasizing the compatibility and supremacy of Islam. Apologists responded to the intellectual challenges coming from the West by adopting pietistic fictions about the Islamic traditions. Such fictions eschewed any critical evaluation of Islamic doctrines, and celebrated the presumed perfection of Islam. A common apologist argument was that any meritorious or worthwhile modern institution was first invented by Muslims. According to the apologists, Islam liberated women, created a democracy, endorsed pluralism, protected human rights and guaranteed social security long before these institutions ever existed in the West. These concepts were not asserted out of critical understanding or ideological commitment, but primarily as a means of resisting Western hegemony and affirming self-worth. The main effect of apologetics, however, was to contribute to a sense of intellectual self-sufficiency that often descended into moral arrogance. To the extent that apologetics were habit-forming, it produced a culture that eschewed self-critical and introspective insight, and embraced the projection of blame and a fantasy-like level of confidence.

In many ways, the apologetic response was fundamentally centered on power. Its main purpose was not to integrate particular values within Islamic culture, but to empower Islam against its civilizational rival. Muslim apologetics tended to be opportunistic and rather unprincipled, and, in fact, they lent support to the tendency among many intellectuals and activists to give precedence to the logic of pragmatism over any other competing demands. Invoking the logic of necessity or public interest to justify courses of action, at the expense of moral imperatives, became common practice. Effectively, apologists got into the habit of paying homage to the presumed superiority of the Islamic tradition, but marginalized this idealistic image in everyday life.

Post-1970s Salafism adopted many of the premises of the apologetic discourse, but it also took these premises to their logical extreme. Instead of simple apologetics, Salafism responded to feelings of powerlessness and defeat with uncompromising and arrogant symbolic displays of power, not only against non-Muslims, but also against Muslim women. Fundamentally, Salafism, which by the 1970s had become a virulent puritan theology, further anchored itself in the confident security of texts. Nonetheless, contrary to the assertions of its proponents, Salafism did not necessarily pursue objective or balanced interpretations of Islamic texts, but primarily projected its own frustrations and aspirations upon the text. Its proponents no longer concerned themselves with coopting or claiming Western institutions as their own, but defined Islam as the exact antithesis of the West, under the guise of reclaiming the true and real Islam. Whatever the West was perceived to be, Islam was understood to be the exact opposite.

Alienation from Tradition

Of course, neither Wahhabism nor Salafism is represented by some formal institution. They are theological orientations and not structured schools of thought. Nevertheless, the lapsing and bonding of the theologies of Wahhabism and Salafism produced a contemporary orientation that is anchored in profound feelings of defeat, frustration and alienation, not only from modern institutions of power, but also from the Islamic heritage and tradition. The outcome of the apologist, Wahhabi and Salafi legacies is a supremacist puritanism that compensates for feelings of defeat, disempowerment and alienation with a distinct sense of self-righteous arrogance vis-à-vis the nondescript "other"—whether the other is the West, non-believers in general or even Muslims of a different sect and Muslim women. In this sense, it is accurate to describe this widespread modern trend as supremacist, for it sees the world from the perspective of stations of merit and extreme polarization.

In the wake of the September 11 attacks, several commentators posed the question of whether Islam somehow encourages violence and terrorism. Some commentators argued that the Islamic concept of *jihad* or the notion of the *dar al-harb* (the abode of war) is to blame for the contemporary violence. These arguments are anachronistic and Orientalist. They project Western categories and historical experiences upon a situation that is very particular and fairly complex. One can easily locate an ethical discourse within the Islamic tradition that is uncompromisingly hostile to acts of terrorism. One can also locate a discourse that is tolerant toward the other, and mindful of the dignity and worth of all human beings. But one must also come to terms with the fact that supremacist puritanism in contemporary Islam is dismissive of all moral norms or ethical values, regardless of the identity of their origins or foundations. The prime and nearly singular concern is power and its symbols. Somehow, all other values are made subservient. ■

Endnotes

1 Khaled Abou El Fadl, "Islamic Law and Muslim Minorities: The Juristic Discourse on Muslim Minorities from the Second/Eighth to the Eleventh/Seventeenth Centuries," *Journal of Islamic Law and Society* 22/1 (1994).

2 Khaled Abou El Fadl, "The Rules of Killing at War: An Inquiry into Classical Sources," *The Muslim World* 89 (1999).

3 Muhammad Amin Ibn 'Abidin, *Hashiyat Radd al-Muhtar*, vol. VI (Cairo: Mustafa al-Babi, 1966), p. 413; Ahmad al-Sawi, *Hashiyat al-Sawi 'ala Tafsir al-Jalalayn*, vol. III (Beirut: Dar Ihya' al-Turath al-Arabi, n.d.), pp. 307-308. See also Ahmad Dallal, "The Origins and Objectives of Islamic Revivalist Thought, 1750-1850," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 113/3 (1993).