

EXTERNALIZING ISLAM: MANIPULATION OF ISLAM'S INNER AND OUTER
DIMENSIONS AND THE FRAGMENTATION OF JUSTICE AND PIETY

by

JEREMY COLE

(Under the Direction of Kenneth Honerkamp)

ABSTRACT

This thesis attempts to locate the roots of extremism inside and outside the Islamic Tradition, which are caused in part by the modern world-view, which prioritizes the external over the internal, thereby generating a false dichotomy between Islam's esoteric and exoteric dimensions. When in harmony, the esoteric and exoteric dimensions of Islam open a forgiving middle path for its followers, and close the door to extremism in all of its forms. Disregarding the relationship between these elements in the Islamic tradition can lead to inaccurate and extreme manifestations and constructions of Islam. As evidence, this thesis will analyze the broad notion of the 'Islamic Tradition,' Sufism in the Ottoman Empire, and the concept of *hijra*. In each case an understanding of the dialectical relationship between Islam's inner and outer dimensions helps to reconstruct the peaceful, compassionate intentions of the Islamic Tradition that has been so badly damaged in modern times.

INDEX WORDS: Islam, Esoteric, Exoteric, Sufism, Ottoman Empire, *Hijra*,
Extremism

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the hidden, quiet and humble aspects of our days, the remembrance of grace, and the thread of hope that the world will cycle out of its extreme ways.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“But you should realize that He is hidden in His manifestations by the intense way in which He is manifest, for His manifestness is the reason for His being hidden, as His very light blocks His light.” -al-Ghazālī¹

“It is not piety, that you turn your faces to the East and to the West. True piety is this: to believe in God, and the Last Day, the angels, the Book, and the Prophets, to give of one’s substance, however cherished, to kinsmen, and orphans, the needy, the traveler, beggars, and to ransom the slave, to perform the prayer, to pay the alms...” -Qur’an (2:177)²

We live in a world saturated by the simplicity of extremism. This extremism, while not in the majority, nonetheless seems to have a grip over many of those in power in today’s world. Tradition, with its accumulated and accumulating vault of timeless and compassionate wisdom, stands on the margins, watching as lesser and lesser qualified individuals attempt to claim direct and easy access to truth and authority. One of the main causes of this extremism is modern mankind’s loss of belief in the Transcendent and the Unseen³ and excessive belief in the idea that human beings have the ability to know all there is to know, and thus the ability to control its own destiny and create its own meaning. In this loss, modern man has placed excessive and obsessive priority on

¹ David Burrell and Nazih Daher, translators, *Al-Ghazali: The Ninety Nine Beautiful Names of God*, (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1992), 134.

² All translations of the Qur’an in this thesis are from A.J. Arberry’s *The Koran Interpreted*, (Simon and Schuster: New York, 1996).

³ By way of contrast, the notion of the importance of the Unseen is emphasized greatly in the Qur’an. See, for example, 2:3, 3:44, 3:179, 4:34, 5:94, 5:109, 5:116, 6:50, 6:59, 6:73, 7:188, 9:78, 9:94, 9:105, 10:20, 11:31, 11:49, 11:123, 12:81, 12:102, 13:9, 16:77, 18:26, 19:61, 19:78, 23:92, 27:65, 27:75, 31:20, 32:6, 34:3, 34:14, 34:48, 34:53, 35:18, 35:38 among many other examples. Thus, Qur’anic epistemology,

the observable world as the basis for all Truth. The assumption behind this externalization of knowledge and meaning is that human beings hold ultimate authority over the universe. With this authority comes the desire for power and control, leading Huston Smith to argue that “the modern ethos... is a blend of naturalism and control.”⁴ In short, modern man has come to the conclusion that we must study the material world, which is the only reality, in order to control it, for this is our only path to meaning and order in the world.⁵ In this grab for knowledge and power, the human method of control and coercion of nature has led to a system of control and coercion over fellow humans beings as sources of power in the world. Extremism arises in this fertile soil of “naturalism and control,” as a necessary by-product of a world in which human beings are the means and the end, and thus must generate more and more extreme views in order to influence others and gain power. With no ultimate All-Knowing Being to locate and humble it, modern mankind exists in a fierce competition for authority and Truth. In this endless competition, one of the most effective methodologies employed is that of extremism.

In the following discussion, I will look at the ways in which specific extremist internal (Muslim) and external (Orientalist) constructions of Islam relate to one another based upon a shared epistemology devoid of the Unseen and hungry for control. I will argue that extremism exists both within Islam and in external constructions of Islam in a dialectical relationship, and that this extremism exists because of a lack of attention paid

broadly speaking, is based upon the notion that God is Unseen and that belief in this Unseen is vital for true faith.

⁴ Huston Smith, *Beyond the Post-Modern Mind*, (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 76.

⁵ Thus, in the words of Seyyid Hossein Nasr, “knowledge has become separated from being and the bliss or ecstasy which characterizes the union of knowledge and being.” Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 1. In separating knowledge from its source, there is no longer a

to the *relationship* between the esoteric and exoteric dimensions of Islam, which advocates a broad, forgiving path. This extremism, on both sides, is characterized by a deep pride in the authority of its believers as holders of the Truth, exclusive of all other claims, and also by a focus primarily upon Islam's outward form while ignoring its equally important inner essence.

I am limiting the scope of my discussion *within* the Islamic tradition to Wahhabism and all other manifestations of Islam that express "hostility to intellectualism, mysticism and any sectarian divisions within Islam."⁶ These movements claim ultimate and pure authority over all other Muslims and they outwardly and directly deny the existence of a more personal, and therefore more hidden, dimension of Islam. They have become very popular in recent times and they affect the thinking of Muslims and non-Muslims alike around the globe, and thus are in dire need of serious scholarly attention.⁷ I must make it clear that I am not speaking of Islamic movements of the 19th and 20th centuries that have fought against the encroaching foreign power of the modern West.⁸ These movements, in many ways, have different goals and, for the most part, vastly different methods for achieving these goals. Instead, I have chosen to focus on

central authority and arbiter of Truth. This leads to grasps for power which become more and more extreme in their desperation to find an answer and to convince others of their Truth.

⁶ Khaled Abu El Fadl, "Islam and the Theology of Power," *Middle East Report* 221. (Winter 2001): 31.

⁷ For a further discussion of the reasons for this growth of the Wahhabi mentality and doctrine in Islam, see El Fadl, "Islam and the Theology of Power."

⁸ When I speak of 'extremism' in Islam, I am limiting my analysis to those groups whose denial of the inner, mystical dimensions of Islam is the strongest. This means, for the most part, the Wahhabi and Salafi movements that began in the 18th century and continue to grow today. I do not mean to suggest that these movements have no relationship to what have been termed modern 'fundamentalist' Islamic movements (groups associated with the thought of people such as Sayyid Qutb, Abd A'lá Mawdūdī, or Osama bin Laden, among others). Certainly there is a very deep connection between the two, but they are outside the scope of this thesis. Further, I will not speak in this thesis of the direct role that Western imperialism and colonization played in the development of fundamentalist movements within Islam. Instead, I am more interested in the ways in which Islam turned outward beginning in the early 18th century and denied its esoteric dimensions, as both an independent movement within Islam itself and as an example of perhaps the earliest Western contact and relationship of discourse with the Islamic world.

movements within Islam that deny Islam's own esoteric dimensions, and thus a large part of its tradition.

Outside of the Islamic tradition, I will focus on the Orientalist discourse on Islam as discussed by Edward Said and others.⁹ I am less concerned with arguing for or against this controversial position, and more interested in assuming that it contains some underlying truths that can be useful to understand when studying Islam. This discourse, in scholarship and the media, has served to order and represent Islam to control Islam's power in the world. I will explore one aspect of this 'ordering' as is manifested in the historical and theological denial of Islam's inner dimensions and the relationship of these dimensions to Islam's outer dimensions.

In contrast to the thrust of modernist intellectual thought (since the Enlightenment) concerning religious faiths, my premise - which is the foundation of all that follows and which I will support in the coming pages - is that religious faiths, in their essence, speak to a middle path that is just and compassionate. This middle path, this broad avenue of mercy, abhors extremism in all of its forms. Further, I will argue that religious faiths act as metaphorical vessels in the desert of time collecting the sweet drops of the Divine and preserving this essence of wisdom despite the onslaught of historical and temporal circumstance. This outward vessel in the desert is mirrored in the depths of the soul of the believer; thus all that is outward is inward, and all that is hidden is manifest. From this, I will argue in the following pages that this preserved essence is what can be called the Traditional, and that the Traditional advocates a middle path of

⁹ See, for example, Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (Vintage Books: New York, 1994), *Covering Islam: how the media and the experts determine how we see the rest of the world*, (Vintage Books: New York, 1994) and Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

inward and outward humility, compassion and purity that speaks both to the individual soul and to the community at large in a delicate balance devoid of extremism.¹⁰ Finally, in the proceeding chapters I will show that Tradition can not and should not be set against progress, for Tradition is not opposed to progress but is the very collection of all that can help temporal man achieve true progress.

Beginning from these premises allows one to position one's self at a relatively objective distance from the extremes and thus to gain a better perspective upon that which truly is extreme, exclusively external, and marginal. Extremism is generally characterized by its intended differentiation from the mainstream. Thus, its policies, procedures and doctrines tend to be absolutist in nature, pushing mainstream doctrine to its farthest degrees. Extremism is also marked by a total disregard for accumulated Tradition, and thus *authority* is given to only a narrowly constructed viewpoint. In Islam, this translates into extremists ignoring the authority of the development of the Islamic tradition throughout the years, including Islamic scholarship beyond the time of the Prophet, Islamic history, and the development of legal, spiritual and moral doctrines. In short, Islamic extremists ignore much of what has happened in the Islamic world in the last fifteen centuries.

Finally, and most importantly in relation to the current discussion, I will show that extremism tends to view the world only in its outward forms and to deny its inward essence. The focus of this extremism is solely upon empirical evidence and ignores all human attempts at humbly representing the Divine. In the end, it is the human spirit - missing from one's television, e-mails, computers and Internet, and present in oral

¹⁰ This middle path is what is called *al-mustaqīm* in the Islamic tradition, which means a broad and straight

teaching and transmission, personal contact, and direct acquisition of knowledge and relationship – that is denied by all extremists, Eastern or Western. Yet the vast majority of those in the world live within the power of this human spirit, and thus outside the bounds of extremism. It is not coincidental that the majority of people living in this way are those who are not in power. It is here, in these quiet corners of past and present, that the whisper of the majority can be heard, speaking out against the extremism of today’s world. As a Muslim scholar has recently argued, in speaking of Islam, “the extremists remain numerically and intellectually on the extremes. Islam is, despite the headlines, a success story. Most Muslims prefer the spiritual to the frantic; patience to the primal scream.”¹¹

This externalization and, as Seyyid Hossein Nasr has argued, “desacralization”¹² of knowledge itself has led in part to a movement within Islam itself toward total externalization of its tradition in the extremist doctrines of the Wahhabis¹³ and their followers, who call themselves *Ahl al-Tawhīd*, or “the asserters of divine unity.” The Wahhabi’s severe condemnation of all forms of mystical Islam, their destruction of tombs

path leading toward Truth, goodness, and ultimately, God.

¹¹ Abdal-Hakim Murad, *Muslim Loyalty and Belonging: Some Reflections on the Psychosocial Background*, [online]. January 2003. Available from Internet: <http://65.39.144.73/ISLAM.ahm/loyalty.htm>, 8. In this web-based article, Murad argues that extreme Islam has moved from “a vocabulary of faith into the vocabulary of identity” but that this extremist Islam cannot and must not survive, and that mainstream, Traditional Muslims must lead the charge against this growing extremism.

¹² See Seyyid Hossein Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred*, for a clear and comprehensive view of the secularization of knowledge in the West and its historical development, as well as the loss of the sapiential dimension of knowledge.

¹³ Yet, as Hamid Algar has recently argued in *Wahhabism: A Critical Essay* (Oneonta: Islamic Publications International, 2002), the Wahhabi movement is based upon very little theoretical, philosophical, or rational substance. As he says, “in the extremely lengthy and rich history of Islamic thought, Wahhabism does not occupy a particularly important place.” Further, he argues that it has “been observed by knowledgeable Sunnis since the earliest times that the Wahhabis do not count as part of the *Ahl al-Sunnawa al-Jama’a*, for almost all the practices, traditions, and beliefs denounced by Muhammad b. ‘Abd al-Wahhab have been historically integral to Sunni Islam.” Nonetheless, I believe the movement cannot be dismissed entirely, as its followers are many and their beliefs earnest, and they represent a radical element of Islam that exists, at

of Islamic saints, their claims to the pure Truth of Islam, and their designation of all that is not Wahhabi to be *shirk*, are important consequences within Islam of the loss of the sacred in the modern world. They have physically and intellectually removed the places of human contact and worship of the Divine from the landscape.

The externalization of knowledge has also led to the problem, outside of Islam, of a further widening of the gap of misunderstanding between Islam and the modern world (whose main power today is the United States of America); just as it has also led to constructions of Islam in the West that move farther and farther from the eternal, nameless center of the Islamic tradition. One of the main forces within Islam that helps to sustain its tradition, I will argue, is none other than the interplay, tension and creativity *between* Islam's outer forms and its inner essence. To have one without the other is to speak of Islam without its tradition, as a backward and archaic faith that is diametrically opposed to the modern world. Further, in recent times, constructions of Islam that leave out its personal, esoteric nature is the perfect dehumanizing tool needed for purposes of political demonization and creation of an enemy 'Other.'

Extremism within Islam and in Western constructions of Islam exists in a dialectical relationship. The external categories of inquiry of modernity toward Islam lead us to external constructions of Islam. These external constructions of Islam, in turn, influence internal manifestations of Islam. The extremist methodology of the Wahhabis, on the other hand, generates doctrine and dogma within Islam that is external and extreme in nature, ignoring Islam's inner, personal nature and advocating a return to the purity of Muhammad's time in a modern age. Thus, Islamic extremists add fuel to the

least in part, in conjunction with and intimately related to the secularization of knowledge found in

fire of Western observers of Islam, creating and following extreme Western constructions of Islam. Both extremist Islam and extreme constructions of Islam, therefore, help to create and sustain one another.

Western constructions of Islam affect the Islamic tradition and Islamic extremism affects Western constructions of Islam in ways that are not always outwardly apparent. The extremist methodologies of many Western constructions of Islam are therefore on the margins of mainstream religion, attempting to impose artificial categories denying the possibility of revelation, miracles, and true prophecy, on a tradition where these claims are fundamental. This Orientalist scholarship provides an insidious type of authority for those outside of the ivory tower who practice true extremism on either side. This disguised relationship between extreme Islam and extreme constructions of Islam combine to form a powerful force against Traditional Islam. The current discussion, however, agrees with Abdal-Hakim Murad's simple statement that "Never will extremism triumph for long, simply because normal people do not want it."¹⁴ But Traditional Islam cannot be passive, it must assert its essence in these times whenever possible. So let us begin.

In attempting to name and define the Islamic Tradition over the years, scholars of Islam have categorized both the timeless, essential features and the temporal manifestations of this massive, religio-cultural civilization.¹⁵ In this process of naming and delineating the "Islamic Tradition," a variety of definitions have arisen to give shape

modernism.

¹⁴ Murad, 6.

¹⁵ For purposes of this discussion, I will be speaking mostly of Sunni Islam when I speak of Traditional Islam, although some of the same arguments can be applied to Shiism. A relationship between the marginalization of Sufism and Shiism and the relationship of this marginalization to modernism can certainly be seen, but is outside the scope of this thesis.

to Islam as such. What has always been clear is that finding the Truth of the Islamic Tradition is an impossible task, not just for its enormity but also for its inherent nature as an un-definable truth. One clear characteristic of extremists is that they believe this definition can be found, possessed by humans, and controlled for political means. As Frithjof Schuon has shown, while “irrefutable proofs of the truth of a Tradition” exist, “these proofs, which are of a purely spiritual order, while being the only possible proofs in support of a revealed truth, entail at the same time a denial of the pretensions to exclusiveness of the form.”¹⁶ Thus, “the exoteric claim to the exclusive possession of a unique truth, or of Truth without epithet, is therefore an error purely and simply.”¹⁷ One method of discerning extreme views lies in their lack of humility based upon their belief to be the only holders of the Truth. But, as Schuon has shown us, this type of thinking, while rampant in the world today, is simply incorrect.

All religious traditions struggle to define both their outward form and their inward essence. While the form is able to be shaped and named and categorized, the essence is not. History and text have shown us that one can only approach a definition of Tradition by naming its doctrines, its institutions, and its pillars, but one can never arrive through naming alone. This is the condition of the human being that believes in a God that is of the essence, All-Knowing and separate from the particular and limited human being. This inability to define, however, should not mean sincere efforts should be stopped. Instead, it is these sincere efforts, and this very sincerity itself, in fact, which shape and define the various manifestations of religion in the world. As the famous hadith says,

¹⁶ Frithjof Schuon, *The Transcendent Unity of Religions*, (New York: Pantheon, 1953), 34.

¹⁷ Schuon, 34.

On the authority of Abū Ruqayya Tamīm ibn Aus ad-Dārī (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Prophet (may the blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said:

Religion is sincerity. We said: To whom? He said: To Allah and His Book, and His Messenger, and to the leaders of the Muslims and their common folk.¹⁸

In the following pages I will offer another humble and sincere attempt at pointing out certain guidelines for understanding the Islamic tradition, in all of its diverse and various forms *and* in its essential and unitary nature.

My basic argument will be that, in defining the Islamic tradition as being in utter opposition to extremism, it is important to keep in mind the essential relationship of the inner and outer natures of Islam, just as Muslims are commanded to be mindful of the inner/hidden (*al-bāṭin*) and outer/manifest (*al-zāhir*) natures of God. Far too often, Islam is constructed in the modern world based only upon its outward forms, chiefly because the very categories of analysis and epistemological bases of modernity are inputs, which lead necessarily to an output that is external in nature.¹⁹ Western conceptions of Islam have historically, politically and spiritually constructed an edifice wholly different from the very core of Islam as a religion of guidance and relationship between God who is Supreme and eternal and humans who are dependent and temporal. Further, the Islamic tradition itself has also seen the expansion of extremism in the last few centuries. In these movements, I argue the Islamic tradition has been cut off from its basic regenerative and sustaining force in the world, namely, its personal, inner and esoteric dimensions.

¹⁸ Hadith # 7 in *Forty Hadith*, An-Nawawi, translated by Ezzeddin Ibrahim and Denys Johnson-Davies, (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1997), 44.

¹⁹ Smith, 126-127.

As al-Ghazāli shows us in his explanation of God as *al-bāṭin* and *al-zāhir* at the top of this chapter, God is both hidden and manifest in the same breath in the Islamic tradition. For al-Ghazāli, who has greatly influenced Islamic philosophical and mystical thought and whose influence has been compared to that of St. Augustine in Christianity,²⁰ there is no manifested God without the hidden, and there is no hidden God without the manifest. The total manifestation of God is also His total hidden-ness. The very existence of one depends upon the other, as they define each other's borders, and allow the observer to differentiate between the two and name them both. So, as al-Ghazāli argues, God is He “who is concealed from creatures by His light and hidden from them by the intensity of His manifestations.”²¹ He continues by saying that man cannot see himself

in the arrangement of his members and parts among themselves, external and internal, as well as the attributes and states of his which carry on autonomically through no choice of his, without seeing in them an eloquent witness to the one who created them. So it is with everything that sees with all of its senses, within itself or outside itself.²²

Just as God has inner and outer manifestations, so too do humans, as mirrors of the Divine, have inner and outer natures. So, in the doctrine of many Sufi orders, there exists the idea of the lower self (the *nafs*), which is the outer aspect of man pulling him down toward earth, and the higher self (the *rūh*), which is the inner aspect of man that pulls him toward God.²³ Both of these aspects must be studied and taken into account in any study of either the outside of the inside realms. How can we see the manifest unless we

²⁰ Halil Inalcik, *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age, 1300-1600*, translated by Norman Itzkowitz and Colin Imber, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973), 166.

²¹ Al-Ghazāli, 136.

²² Al-Ghazāli, 135.

understand the hidden, which helps to define and determine the limits of the manifest? And, consequently, how can we see the exoteric aspect of Islam unless we understand its esoteric nature?

If one's epistemology is based upon a God who is both inward and outward, immanent and transcendent (as scholars often assert the Islamic God to be in Traditional Islam²⁴), then several things necessarily follow.²⁵ First, the religion which holds this view (in this case, Islam) must also contain inner and outer dimensions. The religious Tradition, Islam, naturally takes on the qualities of its God. By analogy, then, the hidden and the manifest of *Islam* are dependent upon one another for the existence of the whole, just as they are in God. To be able to see only the 'manifest,' or external, elements of Islam is to be blind to the full Reality of the Islamic Tradition. As al-Ghazāli says, "the existence of light is known by the absence of light, if the condition of absence is set beside by the absence of light."²⁶ In Islam, the condition of its exoteric nature is set beside its esoteric nature, and therefore, these two categories serve to create and define one another. Without one, describing and naming the other with any accuracy is virtually impossible, because it is virtually impossible to delineate either aspect without having both.

²³ See Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 191ff, for a further explanation of Sufi psychology.

²⁴ See, for example, William Chittick and Sachiko Murata's *The Vision of Islam* (New York: Paragon House, 1994); Seyyid Hossein Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred* (Albany: State University of New York Press: 1989) and *Ideals and Realities of Islam* (New York: Preager, 1967).

²⁵ My logic here is taken direct from Dr. Alan Godlas' teachings at the University of Georgia and is also very similar to Huston Smith's logic in defining the process whereby epistemologies produce ontologies which in turn produce anthropologies, *Beyond the Post-Modern World*, 103.

²⁶ Al-Ghazāli, 136.

Human beings within this system of thought must also be seen to have inner and outer dimensions. Thus, human beings take on the characteristics of their Creator and of their religion, mirroring these two in its own dichotomy of a hidden and manifest psychology. Thus, one's anthropology (i.e. beliefs about one's humanness) falls in line naturally from one's epistemology and ontology. And finally, that the methodologies used by these humans to study, learn and educate others in the world must have inner and outer dimensions. Interestingly, this last point is extremely important in studying Islam. This is because the Islamic Tradition focuses mostly upon either the inward, Compassionate natures of God, or the outward, Awesome qualities of God, as is evidenced by the division of the Ninety Nine Names of God into categories of either Wrath or Mercy. The dichotomy is made intentionally clear, in order to stress both aspects of the Divine.

For Islam in particular, then, there is a problem when secular, externalizing modernity meets up with the clear delineation and exposition of God's qualities as both Transcendent, Awesome and Wrathful on the one hand, and Immanent, Merciful and Compassionate on the other. The problem is that in Islam, those who deny the immanence of Allah, and thus the inward gravity of Islam, naturally move toward and focus upon that which is left: God's Wrath, or God's utter transcendence, or the lesser *jihad* (to give three examples). Based on all of this, I argue that it is extremely important that the scholar of Islam maintains a balance of the inner and outer forces in his or her studies of Islam. In so doing, the scholar will be able to paint a more accurate picture of the delicate balance in the Islamic tradition between a Compassionate, Merciful God, on

the one hand, and an Awesome, Wrathful God on the other, and as a whole generate a greater understanding of this Tradition.

It must be made clear that I am not arguing the notion that external views of Islam's purely outward forms are meaningless and pointless to pursue. On the contrary, they form one half of the Islamic tradition, and one half of the study of the Islamic tradition. Many studies of Islam's outward forms have been and continue to be extremely illuminating and helpful. What I am suggesting, however, is that an inner perspective on the inner dimensions of Islam is also vital in understanding as completely as possible the *whole* of the Islamic center. Far too often in the modern world, these inner dimensions are marginalized or, worse, left out all together. In so doing, damage is done to the tradition itself, which should be evaluated on its own terms lest it become unfairly and inaccurately characterized. This inaccuracy, in my judgment, is unavoidable yet not too terribly harmful when different epistemological worldviews collide. However, when the volatile forces of political, social, military and economic dominance then come into play, as they exist in today's world,²⁷ the very Tradition itself is externalized and controlled. It is within these conditions that extremism arises. This insidious form of colonization, conveniently, is an area of evidence that remains hidden and subtle and thus under the radar screen of the majority who employ purely external methodology in their analysis. Thus, the argument faces much resistance when it is up against the closely guarded wall of the externalized epistemology characteristic of the modern world.

²⁷ The total military, economic and social dominance of the West, and in particular the United States, in today's world is indisputable, and the lack of need for evidence of this claim proves its unassailable position.

In a broad sense, I am exploring the term esoteric, from the viewpoint that it could not exist without its opposite and pair, the exoteric. Thus, to think of the esoteric only in its elitist connotations as “intended for or understood by only a particular group,”²⁸ is to miss its other meaning, which is of the hidden/inner, and the relationship between this inner dimension of religion and its outer manifestations. The strict delineation between the esoteric and exoteric is a result of the modern tendency to prioritize outward authority over inward meditation, form over the essence, and desacralized knowledge over the sacred.²⁹ The exoteric is limited in its scope, and several inherent problems arise if it is pursued exclusively.

First, the purely exoteric misses the shades of reality and meaning in the world, opting instead for a clear (and extreme!) black and white picture of reality. As Frithjof Schuon has argued, “the most important among the conceptions which are inaccessible to exotericism is, in certain respects at least, that of the gradation of universal Reality: Reality affirms itself by degrees, but without ceasing to be ‘one’, the inferior degrees of this ‘affirmation’ being absorbed, by metaphysical integration or synthesis, into the superior degrees.”³⁰ Pure exotericism posits a world empty of the subtlety of shades of meaning, a loss of metaphor, and an oversimplification of the complexity and depth of life given. Instead, Tradition is presented in stark terms, and reality is seen as easily understandable to all in overly simplistic terms.

Second, the exoteric, as has been briefly mentioned above, is characterized by its insistence on possessing the Truth. It defines the parameters and claims exclusive

²⁸ *The American Heritage Dictionary*, Second College Edition, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1985), 465.

²⁹ For a further discussion of this point, please see Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred*, Chapter One.

authority over the simple reality that it posits. Schuon has described the selfishness of these exclusive claims by saying,

Every exoteric perspective claims, by definition, to be the only true and legitimate one. This is because the exoteric point of view, being concerned only with an individual interest, namely salvation, has no advantage to gain from knowledge of the truth of other traditional forms.³¹

Thus, the exoteric is recognizable in its claims to the Truth and to Authority, in its lack of subtlety of thought, and in its inability to discern the various levels of Reality. Schuon, speaking in 1953, already saw the growing materialism of Western culture, and he spoke with great clarity about the loss of the inner realms to a fearful world grabbing for material power.

This complicated relationship between the inner and outer dimensions of Islam is argued by al-Ghazāli, who finishes his argument on the manifest and hidden natures of God by showing the paradoxical nature of God's hidden and manifest natures: "Praise be to Him who is concealed from creatures by His light and hidden from them by the intensity of His manifestations."³² God's hidden-ness from mankind comes from the brightness of His manifestations. Just as God's internal essence is hidden and subtle by its very manifestations of form, so too is Islam a religious tradition with hidden and manifested dimensions. While the hidden are not directly in sight, I argue that the inner view of the Islamic tradition is vital in defining that very tradition. While they are ultimately unknowable, the persistent search and presence of these inner qualities is essential in understanding the larger Islamic tradition.

³⁰ Schuon, 53.

³¹ Schuon, 25.

³² Al-Ghazāli, 136

Having demonstrated thus far that a fresh look at the relationship between the inner and outer dimensions of Islam is needed to combat extremism, I will begin by laying down the conceptual framework for my project, exploring further the notion of Tradition and those thinkers most concerned with it, known as the Traditionalists. I will proceed to a discussion of Tradition as it relates to authority, which will lead into my notion that one place where the Islamic Tradition is highly concentrated is in its liminal and peripheral locations, borrowing from the arguments of Victor Turner and historian Richard Bulliet in his book *Islam: The View From the Edge*.³³

In the third chapter I will apply my conceptual framework to a historical study of Sufism in the Ottoman Empire. I will analyze the portrayals of Ottoman history and origins, arguing that far too often the important influence of the esoteric Sufi brotherhoods is ignored. Further, it is these Sufi orders, in tension and agreement with Islamic orthodoxy, which helped to shape the Islamic Tradition in the Ottoman Empire. Thus, the borders between orthodox and mystical Islam are extremely porous in the Ottoman Empire, and it can be helpful to further analyze and understand these porous boundaries in Ottoman scholarship. Finally, I argue that the influence of Sufism has been erased to a large extent in historical accounts of the Ottoman Empire in both intentional and unintentional ways. The reclamation of Sufism in Ottoman history is an important aspect in bringing together a more subtle and accurate historical account of the Ottoman Empire, which relies on the inner and outer natures of Islam.

In the fourth chapter I will discuss the concept of *hijra* in the Islamic Tradition, employing a methodology that traces both the linguistic and religious roots of the term, as

³³ Richard Bulliet, *Islam: The View From the Edge*, (Columbia University Press: New York, 1994).

well as the development of its use in Islamic society down through the ages in various historical contexts. I will argue that the *hijra* narrative is a wonderful example (among many others) of the interrelationship of the inner and outer natures of Traditional Islam. It exemplifies the liminality, movement, tension and deep connection inherent in the Islamic Tradition between the esoteric and the exoteric. It addresses directly the question of the relationship between the esoteric periphery – the individual, the immanent, the mystical – and the exoteric power structure – the community, the transcendent, the orthodox - both in its meanings and in its uses.

The fifth chapter will serve as the conclusion, showing that Western scholars of religion and certain modern forms of Islam are characterized by their extremism, their claims to power and authority, and their lack of understanding of the influence of esoteric Islam. They thus do damage to the Islamic tradition. The role of the esoteric edges must be re-emphasized as an important methodological tool for understanding Islam as a complete system of belief with a solid Tradition speaking to our individual and communal natures as human beings, and providing a fair and just middle path upon which to tread. I will end with the thought that the very nature of knowledge itself, in much of the modern world, exists to sustain and augment those in power through justifications of this power. In fact, however, a nobility of knowledge-seeking is needed, which will respect and do justice to the nobility of Traditional Islam, seeking to humbly understand rather than jealously control. This nobility can come only when the scholar seeks both knowledge and wisdom, a powerful combination of his/her very own inner and outer natures.

CHAPTER 2

TRADITION, AUTHORITY AND ISLAM

Just as everything becomes manifest to eyesight through outward light, so also everything becomes manifest to inward insight through God...al- Ghazālī³⁴

The above quote, made by the Islamic scholar Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī in his classic work *Mishkāt al-anwār* (“Niche for the Lights”) in the 12th century, illustrates the complimentary nature of the inner and outer realms of reality for Muslims. The concepts of ‘sight’ (as a metaphor for all sense perceptions) and ‘insight’ represent both physical and spiritual levels of reality that exist simultaneously in the world. An equal recognition of and balance between the physical and spiritual worlds is necessary to understand fully the Islamic tradition as it has been passed down through the years.

In this chapter I will explore the notion of the ‘Traditional’ as it relates to Islam, arguing that a redefinition of the Islamic tradition, which includes a basic understanding of the integral relationship between its esoteric and exoteric aspects, and an understanding of the ways in which Tradition is both *generated* and *institutionalized* by the interactions between the people and their rulers, would be extremely helpful for a clearer understanding of Islam. This inclusion of Islam’s inner and outer aspects helps to

³⁴ al-Ghazālī, *The Niche of Lights*, translated by David Buchman, (Provo: Brigham Young University, 1998), 23.

point out the extremism, both inside and outside Islam, that was discussed in the introduction. The ‘Traditional’ will be discussed in light of those most concerned with it, namely, the Traditionalist school of thought composed of such thinkers as René Guénon, Seyyid Hossein Nasr, Huston Smith and Frithjof Schuon.

Of course, it is a difficult task indeed to begin a discussion with such a broad and vast term as ‘Tradition.’ There are many avenues that one can go down, all fraught with over-generalization and inaccuracy. It is made even more difficult by the fact that I freely admit that a true definition of this term cannot be found. Its essence lies hidden from the explorations of human beings. Yet this acknowledgement of the very impossibility in defining the term Tradition is *exactly* where we should begin, as it is in the humility of our efforts that we can make the most progress.

Using Richard Bulliet’s language³⁵, I will argue that my redefinition of the Islamic tradition can be found in high concentrations in its hidden, esoteric ‘edges,’ and in the relationship of these ‘edges’ to the ‘center.’ In emphasizing the importance of both the elite rulers and the people, the concept of authority is located in the interactions between the rulers and the ruled. First, I will provide a working definition of Tradition, based upon the thoughts of the Traditionalists. Secondly, I will explore this definition as it relates to authority, and locate the *genesis* of this authority outside of the traditional centers of power.

The problem of authority as it relates to Tradition will be explored, focusing upon the question of whether Tradition is created from the center or the edge, and how Tradition is sustained. The development of the Islamic tradition, it will be argued, has

two distinct phases. First, tradition is generated in small, diverse local communities from the centers of political power. In this I agree with Richard Bulliet that the *creation* of the Islamic tradition occurs on the edges, the margins, and within transitory, borderland communities. In short, this tradition is generated in the constantly shifting areas of overlap among differing cultures living in the same places, outside of the central power and in the humble fields of everyday life. In these spaces of difference, debate and discussion, the inner nature of religious truth is lived most vividly in the powerful need of justice, tolerance and compassion for survival.

Second, once this local tradition is generated, it is taken from the edges and sustained by the center, or those who wield worldly power. These leaders then institutionalize and centralize this tradition by combining it with their knowledge of the timeless Tradition of Islam in order to create community. In this process of generation of tradition on the edges and institutionalization of Tradition at the center lies the creative force and delicate balance existing between the rulers and the ruled. For Islam, it is this relationship between the city and the countryside, the rulers and the ruled, the center and the edge, and the outer and the inner which comes closest to defining the Islamic tradition as a whole. A failure to understand this point on either side, as is so often the case, leads to a shallow representation of Islam, not very different at all from the 19th century exhibits of Egypt in Europe, discussed by Timothy Mitchell as the “rendering up of the world as a picture.”³⁵ This in turn leads to a move toward the narrow and extreme center (so characteristic of many Wahhabi and Salafi movements and of a good deal of Western scholarship on Islam) and away from the broad and tolerant edges.

³⁵ Richard Bulliet, *Islam: The View from the Edge*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

Tradition, the Traditional and the Loss of the Sacred

When one uses the term ‘Tradition’ in relation to Islam, one immediate concern must be addressed. First and foremost, for many in the modern world, Tradition has a negative connotation as a word sharply contrasted with *innovation* and *progress*. The ‘Traditional’ becomes an unmoving, uninspiring, rigid doctrine diametrically opposed to the discourse of individualism. Naturally Islam, in a weakened political state since the 19th century, is equated in a monolithic fashion with being too ‘Traditional,’ and thus backward. One of the main symptoms of Islam in the modern world, the argument goes, is that it holds on too tightly to its medieval characteristics and is unable to catch up with the modern, industrial world. As Said argues, Westerners have spoken of the Orient by saying, “Their great moments were in the past; they are useful in the modern world only because the powerful and up-to-date empires have effectively brought them out of the wretchedness of their decline and turned them into rehabilitated residents of productive colonies.”³⁷ I argue that it is helpful to get outside of the thinking that Tradition is opposed to progress and innovation, and instead see that it is Tradition itself which lays down (and thereby facilitates) the communal conditions for mankind to progress.

Based on these introductory observations, it seems counterproductive that a 20th century movement called ‘the Traditionalists’ has arisen, arguing for a return to the true Islamic Tradition. Instead, it would seem to make sense to downplay the traditional aspects of Islam and to work toward integrating Islam into the mainstream of the modern world; and many have certainly done this. However, the courage and force with which

³⁶ Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 6. See Chapter One in particular for a full view of the representation of the Middle East in Europe.

such thinkers as Guénon, Schuon, Smith and Nasr have expressed their Traditionalist views of Islam suggests powerfully the very strength of that Tradition itself. This Tradition refuses to lay down in the face of the imposing forces of any specific historical circumstances, particularly to the current fashion of modernity and the over-emphasis on innovation so characteristic in the modern world. The very fact that the modern movement of materialism, extreme individualism and power-grabbing has not overcome us all in a blinding flash of ego is a testament to the staying power of Tradition itself, which stands tall like an ancient redwood, despite the fires and destruction surrounding it.

I will outline my definition of Tradition through the ideas of the Traditionalists, but a few introductory remarks are needed. In defining ‘Tradition,’ I will use the term in two distinct and separate ways throughout the course of this chapter. In this I borrow from the helpful observations of Kenneth Oldmeadow.³⁸ On the one hand, I will use the term Tradition (capital ‘T’) when talking about “the primordial wisdom, or Truth, immutable and unformed.”³⁹ On the other hand, I will speak of a tradition (lower case ‘t’) as “a formal embodiment of Truth under a particular mythological or religious guise which is transmitted through time; or the vehicle for the transmission of this formal embodiment; or the process of transmission itself.”⁴⁰ Thus, Tradition (capital ‘T’) is the un-manifested Unity of the Sacred, and tradition (lower case ‘t’) is the specific historical, political, cultural, and religious expression of the Sacred found in the various manifestations of religion throughout the world. Where Tradition is the One, tradition is multiplicity.

³⁷ Said, 35.

³⁸ Kenneth Oldmeadow, *Traditionalism: Religion in the Light of the Perennial Philosophy*, (Colombo: Sri Lanka Institute of Traditional Studies, 2000).

³⁹ Oldmeadow, 61.

The school of ‘Traditionalism’ is generally agreed to have been started by the French metaphysician René Guénon in the early 20th century.⁴¹ Traditionalists are generally defined as being “committed to the explication of the *philosophia perennis* which lies at the heart of the diverse religions and behind the manifold forms of the world’s different traditions.”⁴² There is some disagreement among these scholars over whether this *philosophia perennis* is a separate and distinct religious tradition that can be practiced, or if one must be within an established religious tradition in order to access it. In any case, these scholars are interested in finding the essence rather than the form, and they all argue that this search for the essence has been abandoned in modern times.

For Traditionalists, Tradition is a relatively new intellectual concept for human beings, simply because pre-modern man “was too deeply immersed in the world created by tradition to have the need for having this concept defined in an exclusive manner.”⁴³ Thus, it has only needed definition when it has been lost, or when human beings have found something different, and thus have needed to distinguish it from this difference. One of the leading Traditionalists of our time, Seyyid Hossein Nasr, defines Tradition as

Truths or principles of a divine origin revealed or unveiled to mankind and, in fact, a whole cosmic sector through various figures envisaged as messengers, prophets, *avatāras*, the Logos or other transmitting agencies, along with all the ramifications and applications of these principles in different realms including law and social structure, art, symbolism the sciences, and embracing of course Supreme Knowledge along with the means for its attainment.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ The ‘Traditionalist’ school is generally considered to include such thinkers as René Guénon, Frithjof Schuon, Huston Smith, Seyyid Hossein Nasr, Ananda Commaraswamy, Titus Burkhardt, Marco Pallis, and Martin Lings, and their disciples.

⁴² Oldmeadow, viii.

⁴³ Nasr, Seyyid Hossein, *Knowledge and the Sacred*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 66.

⁴⁴ Nasr, 68.

We notice from this quote that the epistemology behind Tradition is one based upon revealed knowledge, scripture, and gnosis, rather than upon any human endeavor of reason or individual creativity. It is thus “inextricably related to revelation and religion, to the sacred, to the notion of orthodoxy, to authority, to the continuity and regularity of transmission of the truth, to the exoteric and the esoteric as well as to the spiritual life, science and the arts.”⁴⁵ There is much to be said about these two statements. For the Traditionalists, religion is at the heart of Tradition and is, in fact, its point of origin.⁴⁶ Thus, to study and gain knowledge of Tradition one must begin with religion and religious truths which come from gnosis and which form the basis of all epistemological claims. Secondly, Tradition is equated with orthodoxy for the Traditionalists. Nasr does not speak of Tradition as separate in any way from orthodox, exoteric religion. The Traditional is not *merely* the esoteric, nor is it some nebulous spirituality that exists beneath all religious forms. Nasr and most of the Traditionalists do not advocate the practice of some groundless esoteric spirituality; instead, “the authentically esoteric is always contained within a total and integral tradition.”⁴⁷ Further, Traditionalists believe that Tradition pervades all areas of life, from religion to science to the arts, thus forming a central core around which spins all the various manifestations of its essence.⁴⁸ Tradition, then, becomes an aspect or a *quality* of knowledge for the Traditionalists, which binds knowledge eternally to its source, the sacred.

⁴⁵ Nasr, 68.

⁴⁶ Nasr, 73.

⁴⁷ Nasr, 77.

⁴⁸ Ananda Coomaraswamy has written extensively on the Traditional in the arts, including *Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art*, (New York: Dover Publications, 1956), *Spiritual Authority and Temporal Power in the Indian Theory of Government*, (New York : Oxford University Press, 1993), and *Selected Letters of Ananda K. Coomaraswamy*, (New York : Oxford University Press, 1988).

The basic criticism levied by the Traditionalist school is that the current, modern world is disconnected from its source and unable to tap into the traditions of the past, which are eternal. René Guénon, in his *The Crisis of the Modern World* (published originally in 1927)⁴⁹, states this premise best when he argues in the first chapter (aptly titled “The Dark Age”) that our modern, materialistic society began in the Renaissance and led to the wont of modern man to study only the profane, empirical facts of the world. As he says, from the time of the Renaissance,

Henceforth there was only ‘profane’ philosophy and ‘profane’ science, in other words, the negation of true intellectuality, the limitation of knowledge to its lowest order, namely, the empirical and analytical study of facts divorced from principles, a dispersion in an indefinite multitude of insignificant details, and the accumulation of unfounded and mutually destructive hypotheses and of fragmentary views leading to nothing other than those practical applications that constitute the sole real superiority of modern civilization – a scarcely enviable superiority, moreover, which, by stifling every other preoccupation, has given the present civilization the purely material character that makes of it a veritable monstrosity.⁵⁰

For Guénon, the modern world, in its ‘limitation of knowledge to its lowest order,’ was in crisis, and the only proper remedy was a return to the Traditional, immutable principles of ‘true intellectuality.’ Guénon’s presence, according to S.H. Nasr “was like a sudden burst of lightning, an abrupt intrusion into the modern world of a body of knowledge and a perspective utterly alien to the prevalent climate and world view and completely opposed to all that characterizes the modern mentality.”⁵¹ The severity and exaggeration that characterizes much of Guénon’s work exhibits both a passion of belief in the Traditional and a hyperbole that ignores the positive aspects of the modern world. It is therefore wise to understand Guénon’s passion and extremism in light of Seyyid Hossein Nasr’s words, in which he argues that for Guénon “to build the edifice of traditional

⁴⁹ René Guénon, *The Crisis of the Modern World*, translated by Arthur Osborne, Marco Pallis, and Richard Nicholson, (Sophia Perennis: Ghent, 1996).

⁵⁰ Guénon, 16.

knowledge, he had to break down and remove the rubble of all that pretended to provide ultimate knowledge for modern man... His criticism was extreme and uncompromising because he wanted to prevent any confusion between what modern man understands as philosophy and traditional metaphysics.”⁵²

For Guénon, the world was in crisis, not only on the surface level of politics or law or government, but in a very deep and serious way, in the very way in which knowledge itself was viewed and pursued. Modern society wasn't simply failing to perform its prescribed duties, but in fact the very duties themselves, the premises upon which society functions, were faulty. Thus, all areas of life were affected. Guénon struck at the heart of the matter, bypassing surface problems in his world (a devastating World War in plain historical view, an economic crash looming, etc.) to attack the very nature of modern society itself, calling it 'monstrous.' As Nasr concludes, darkly, “One could say that the traditional worlds were essentially good and accidentally evil, and the modern world essentially evil and accidentally good.”⁵³ Thus, the crisis of our world, emerging from the loss of the Traditional and the Sacred, goes to the very nature of how modern human beings view knowledge and reality.

The Traditionalists attack the way in which knowledge itself is viewed and produced by arguing that in losing the Traditional, modern man has lost the sacred. Thus, Tradition is equated with the sacred, as knowledge has been desacralized. Without the notion of the sacred in knowledge, Tradition cannot exist. As Nasr says, “the Sacred as

⁵¹ Nasr, 101.

⁵² Nasr, 102-103.

⁵³ Nasr, 85.

such is the source of Tradition and what is traditional is inseparable from the sacred.”⁵⁴ For Traditionalists, Tradition is that which grounded in the beginnings of time, in the folds of the Sacred, in the grace of God. It exists, or has existed, in all religious groups and it is what unites all human beings, all religious faiths, and all the world. Nasr’s chapter on “The Desacralization of Knowledge” chronologically traces the history of knowledge-as-sacred down to modern times, arguing for a clear process of desacralization of knowledge that has led to a modern world that has lost its connection to the Absolute. As such, the world has become secular in nature, with thought, reason, language and religion as its victims.⁵⁵ Schuon puts it another way, stating,

In the life of a people there are as it were two halves; one constitutes the play of its earthly existence, the other its relationship with the Absolute. Now what determines the value of a people or of a civilization is not the literal form of its earthly dream - for here everything is merely a symbol - but its capacity to ‘feel’ the Absolute...⁵⁶

The modern world, Traditionalists believe, has lost this feeling of the Absolute. Because of this, the production of knowledge is focused entirely upon outward forms disconnected from their inner essence.

Several consequences emerge from this loss of the sacred. First is the rise of materialism, which denotes a “conception according to which nothing else exists but matter and its derivatives.”⁵⁷ When knowledge is unbound from its source, it no longer prioritizes inner meanings or metaphors. Instead, it focuses only upon what can be measured, calculated, and predicted. In this way, the sacred acts as a force binding human beings and knowledge to its Source, and thus to its inner nature.

⁵⁴ Nasr, 76.

⁵⁵ Nasr, 44-48.

⁵⁶ Frithjof Schuon, *Understanding Islam*, (World Wisdom Books: Bloomington, 1994), 24.

⁵⁷ Guénon, 81.

The second consequence of the loss of the sacred is the rise of individualism. Individualism is defined as “the negation of any principle higher than individuality, and the consequent reduction of civilization, in all its branches, to purely human elements.”⁵⁸ Guénon sees this individualism as “the negation of intellectuality.”⁵⁹ Individualism, in failing to recognize any higher authority than the individual, leads to naturalism, pure rationalism, and ultimately relativism,⁶⁰ as there is no higher being posited to serve as ultimate Knower and Arbiter of Truth. As Nasr puts it, “Individualism in any case does not and cannot play a role in the transmission and interpretation of that which is by definition suprahuman.”⁶¹ Thus, the suprahuman – Tradition – is ignored in favor of human beings attempting to name and control nature with our rationality and knowledge. With ultimate knowledge out of the hands of God and into the hands of man, it has come to be produced in order to control the natural world. This effort at control comes naturally when the power of Truth lies in the hands of temporal, “Promethian”⁶² man, and also arises from the deep-seated fear of the absurdity of life that lies in the heart of those who believe the exterior, natural world to be all that exists.

The third consequence of this view of knowledge and the loss of the sacred is the absence of free thought and freedom in general, a freedom that would otherwise come with the humility inherent in recognizing one’s own limitations. As Guénon has said of the Traditional world, “In a [T]raditional civilization it is almost inconceivable that a man should claim an idea as his own,” because in the Traditional world, “a true idea cannot be

⁵⁸ Guénon, 55.

⁵⁹ Guénon, 56.

⁶⁰ Guénon, 57ff.

⁶¹ Nasr, 80.

⁶² See Nasr, *Knowledge and The Sacred*, Chapter Five.

‘new’, for truth is not the product of the human mind.”⁶³ For Traditionalists, there are no ideas that can be invented or owned. Instead, knowledge itself is seen as being bestowed by God, and thus all that appears new is merely *discovered* with the grace of God, and nothing can be owned individually. In this competition that arises in the ownership of knowledge, freedom of thought takes a back seat to possession of thought. Human beings rarely pursue thoughts outside of the competition for ownership, and most new ideas center around the efficiency and material aspects of the modern world. With individualism and materialism dominating the landscape, Guénon has said that “what the modern world has striven after with all its strength, even when it has claimed in its own way to pursue science, is really nothing other than the development of industry and machinery; and in thus seeking to dominate matter and bend it to their service, men have only succeeded... in becoming its slaves.”⁶⁴ Freedom of thought, found in the Traditional world, has no place in a society which seeks quantity over quality in the desperate competition for ownership of new ideas. Writing in 1927, Guénon says modern man has a “limited intellectual ambition... of inventing and constructing machines” which has led man to “become machines themselves.”⁶⁵

As machines, what is most important in production is efficiency rather than quality. Thus humans are forced to reproduce the same specific movement over and over in order to “avoid the slightest loss in time.”⁶⁶ Ultimately, Guénon says this is the essence of the “most advanced stage of ‘progress.’”⁶⁷ Here we recall our earlier discussion about Western constructions of Islam as being a backward tradition that could

⁶³ Guénon, 56-57.

⁶⁴ Guénon, 87.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

not keep up with the progress of the West. The efficiency of the modern world has disconnected the importance of quality from the modern human soul, leaving only the imprint of progress, innovation, and the material world. The Traditionalists argue that the Sacred leads one back to the *quality* of the individual and communal life, rather than to a reduction of the human soul to its efficiency and ‘production value.’ In this way, Tradition should not be set against progress, as Tradition forms the very substance from which progress, true progress of quality, is made.

The idea of extremism follows from the modern world’s belief in materialism, individualism, and efficiency. The slow march of human beings from Pontifical to Promethian Man⁶⁸ in modern times leads directly to human beings believing that they have the power of Truth and Knowledge in their hands and grasping for this power and control in more and more extreme ways. The competition for authority, power and Truth leads many in the modern world to devise more and more extreme methodologies to account for our lack of a Source (and thus identity) and to convince others of the superiority of human beings as the holders of Ultimate Truth. Without the Sacred as the source of and check to mankind’s knowledge, authority becomes a competitive game where each individual vies for the attention and authority over others. In this competition, those who espouse the most extreme views often hold sway over groups of people groping for identity in a seemingly meaningless and material world. Thus our discussion turns now to some thoughts on authority as it relates to Tradition.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ See Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred*, Chapter Five.

Tradition and Authority

Having dealt with the Traditionalists, their definition of ‘Tradition,’ and their criticism of the modern world which gave rise to this definition, I will now turn to the difficult problem of tradition and authority. One major aspect of the rise of extremism in the modern world is the ability of almost anyone to claim authority over Divine Truth. When this is the case, as we shall see, there is a depth of thought and understanding that is lost, and those in authority become authoritative with no support from the Traditional. The questions that I will be addressing are: Who has the authority to claim understanding of the Absolute? Is it in the hands of the elite or the masses? Who is the carrier, on earth, of this precious primordial Tradition? Is it a worldly power or a Sacred power? To state the problem another way, what is the relationship between the inner, esoteric perennial Tradition that exists and the outer, exoteric authority that lays claim upon this esoteric Tradition?

The Traditionalists consistently deal with this problem in a fairly clear and concise manner, beginning with an analysis of the *transmission* of knowledge. Transmission of knowledge is extremely closely related to authority because those who transmit knowledge (scholars, teachers, governments, etc.) are the ones who have been granted authority (by the people, by military victory, by a University, etc.) to transmit knowledge. Nasr states the problem best with the following question: “Who or what determines religious truth and guarantees the purity, regularity, and perpetuity of a tradition?”⁶⁹ He answers this question by saying that all traditions have different ways of transmitting knowledge, but that ultimately “traditional authority remains inseparable

⁶⁹ Nasr, 79.

from the meaning of tradition itself.”⁷⁰ For the Traditionalists, these transmitters of knowledge who have authority come from the Traditional. Thus, authority is related to Tradition in the sense that those in authority play the largest part in creating, shaping and sustaining that Tradition.

Yet the problem is more difficult, because who determines who is the carrier of ‘traditional authority?’ The distinction I made earlier between capital ‘T’ Tradition and lower case ‘t’ tradition is very important here, for the movement from Tradition to tradition lies at the moment that Divine Authority is passed through the veils of time and space and into the world of temporal authority. In this transfer of unifying Tradition to manifested traditions, just as in the naming of the unnamed, something vital, sacred, and immutable is lost: a humility, a compassion, a mercy. In short, all those grand qualities of God that human beings must try to attain are lost. The movement from Tradition to tradition mirrors the movement from the esoteric to the exoteric, and the movement from the hidden to the manifest. In this rupture, authority becomes problematic, for in the disconnect with the Truth all manner of humans attempt to fill the void, take control and claim Power for themselves. In short, how do we move from the unity of Divine Authority to the multiplicity of human interpretation? In any given specific tradition that makes this move, temporal authority, those who will interpret the Divine Tradition to fit into the local tradition, becomes a major problem. In the Islamic community, for example, when Muhammad died in 632 C.E., the believers struggled greatly to define who had authority to control the suddenly leader-less *umma* (Islamic community).

⁷⁰ Nasr, 80.

Ultimately, the Traditionalists believe that the authority for knowledge must rest in God and God's revelations and then in the hands of an elite few. As Nasr says, “traditional authority remains inseparable from the meaning of tradition itself. There are those who are authorities in traditional matters and there are those who are not; there are those who know and those who do not.”⁷¹ Guénon argues the same point in a different way, saying, in his criticism of democracy, “the higher cannot proceed from the lower... the people cannot confer a power that they do not themselves possess; true power can only come from above...”⁷² Thus, for Traditionalists like Nasr and Guénon, authority in Tradition comes from an elite group of people ‘in the know’ capable of understanding and interpreting timeless Divine Truths into their particular historical circumstances. The very nature of the term *esoteric*, which I have been discussing, connotes special knowledge known only by a small, elite group of people. Thus, the Traditionalists are arguing for a return to the esoteric in the classic sense of returning access to Traditional knowledge to an elite group of people who will lead the people and interpret the Divine Tradition in just and authentic ways.

While I use the philosophy of the Traditionalists as part of my basic assumptions in the present discussion, it is in the idea of authority that I slightly disagree with the Traditionalists. I argue that a more nuanced view of Tradition, authority and esotericism is needed; a view that takes into account both the *origins* and *institutionalization* of authority, and a view that moves away from only an intellectual elite holding all authority or from the people holding all the power. I will show that a view that is skewed too far in the direction of centralized authority or in the other direction of authority resting with

⁷¹ Nasr, 80.

⁷² Guénon, 73.

only the people ultimately leads down a path to extremism. Instead, authority should be in the relationship between the elite and the masses, the rulers and the ruled, the esoteric and the exoteric, God and God's humbled servants.

If the standards for obtaining authority are too low, a simplistic and possibly extreme tradition arises. The Wahhabis serve as a good example of this. The issue of Wahhabism and authority is discussed directly by Khaled M. Abou El Fadl in his book, *And God Knows the Soldiers*, in which he discusses Wahhabism, the United States and the issue of who has authority over the Muslim community.⁷³ In this book, he argues that Wahhabism has found a fertile ground for spreading its doctrines in the United States, because “once in the West, Muslims struggle to be rooted in a tradition, and Wahhabi puritanism offers a convenient, easy and effective package” that “treats religious practice as an extracurricular activity.”⁷⁴ El Fadl believes “the bar for inclusion in the realm of the authoritative is quite low in Wahhabi thought” as “anyone with a minimal amount of study may easily become an authority in ‘true’ Islamicity.”⁷⁵ In this realm, becoming a religious authority requires no real special training, degree or area of specialization. He argues that puritanism leads to authority being accessible in Islam to those with only a “working knowledge of the Qur’an, a selective reading of some works on *hadith*, and the internalization of the conceptual ideal of the ‘true’ Islam.”⁷⁶ This condition of easy access to authority is indeed a breeding ground for extremism in all of its various forms, which, as been mentioned, is characterized by a lack of depth in thinking, a lack of importance placed on transmission over time, and the negation of true intellectuality.

⁷³ Khaled M. Abou El Fadl, *And God Knows the Soldiers: The Authoritative and Authoritarian in Islamic Discourses*, (Lanham: University Press of America, Inc., 2001).

⁷⁴ El Fadl, 14.

⁷⁵ El Fadl, 15.

The individualism that Guénon spoke of is exacerbated when access to authority becomes relatively easy. As he says, in criticizing modern democracy, “democracy can arise only where pure intellectuality no longer exists, as is the case in the modern world.”⁷⁷

Thus, if access to authority becomes too easy, a necessary hierarchy of power is dissolved and chaos and anarchy set in. One must be careful in discussing Tradition not to shift authority too far in the direction of ‘those who don’t know.’ The potential exists in this view for anyone to have authority, which also leads to extremism. Because of this, the Traditionalists disagree with this point, arguing that this view reduces the essence and influence of knowledge and authority by granting access to authority to anyone, regardless of whether they are educated, degreed or even able to read. Guénon in particular is extremely critical of democracy, which is the governmental system which, theoretically, allows all people to have power. For Guénon, modern democracy is fooling people into thinking that they are both rulers and ruled, which he calls “contradictory” and, even further, an “absolute impossibility.”⁷⁸ He says, “the great ability of those who are in control in the modern world lies in making people believe that they are governing themselves.”⁷⁹ Guénon’s vision is of a move away from the logical falseness of democracy and toward an intellectual elite that “would direct everything by an influence of which the people were unaware, and which, the less visible it was, the more powerful it would be.”⁸⁰

On the other hand, if authority is too inaccessible and removed, there are too many people who are powerless, and thus the opportunity for corruption and, in reaction,

⁷⁶ El Fadl, 15.

⁷⁷ Guénon, 78.

⁷⁸ Guénon, 74.

revolution necessarily grows. This view leads to the abuse of power so characteristic of authoritarian regimes. Simply put, history has shown us that the power mankind has to rule over others on earth cannot be trusted in the hands of a single individual, or even an elite few. Extremism also arises in this instance. While standing upon insightful and powerful premises Guénon's utopian vision of an elite few governing quietly does not, in my opinion, stand up to the test of practicality. Like the Traditionalists in general, he equates the Traditional too much with an elite center, not addressing problems of who will be a check to this elite, how dictatorship can be avoided, and how the masses will not be totally subjugated into an uneducated group of second class citizens. As the Declaration of Independence of the United States of America says,

Whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the *People* to alter or to abolish it... Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Depostism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security.⁸¹

In short, the Traditionalists, in my view, have not taken into account a worst case scenario in which an elite group holds power and wields it in an evil and unchecked way; rather the Traditionalists focus on the "best case scenario" of having a Khalifa or a true Pontiff, one who is deserving of relatively supreme interpretive authority. The notion of the checks and balances of authority needs to be further explored in Traditionalist thought; otherwise, authority relies solely upon an individual's benevolence. History shows us that one cannot trust this notion of benevolence in individual human rulers,

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ Guénon, 80.

⁸¹ *The Declaration of Independence of the United States of America*, in *The Federalist*, Alexander Hamilton, John Jay and James Madison, (New York: The Modern Library, no copyright date), 619.

even the highly educated, because the urge for wealth, power and fame overcomes most souls presented with such opportunities. One need only to look at governments across the world that have been run by an elite few throughout history to notice a pattern of abuse and, consequently, revolution by the people. The French and American Revolutions serve as two examples among many other backlashes against extreme centralized rule.

If my examples of the American and French Revolutions do not suffice, I offer another historical problem within the Islamic tradition. If one argues that all authority comes from above, from an intellectual elite class that is flawless (as in the concept of *işma* in the Shi'a tradition), how can one explain the fact that Muhammad was in many ways anti-intellectual, illiterate and, while from a prominent family, known more for his trustworthy characteristics than his status as an elite member of society? The problem here lies in one's definition of the term 'elite.' In truth, there are many different types of elites (intellectual, political, spiritual, socio-economic etc.) that exist. The problem that I am pointing to here lies in the fact that in the modern West, in many instances the term elite is equated with the socio-political elite.⁸² Traditionalists, on the other hand, speak generally in terms of a spiritual elite. I argue Traditionalists need to develop a clearer definition of elite in order to avoid misinterpretation in the West and to further clarify their ideas of authority and access to authority.

The concept of access to authority becomes the key point in a discussion of Tradition, as authority of Tradition is generally given rather than taken, and the criteria for establishing one as authoritative is key to establishing what that tradition will

ultimately be. I agree with El Fadl and the Traditionalists that there must be a high standard for access to authority, because easy access gives rise to splinter movements that have no basis in time-tested, Traditional knowledge and study. As I argue throughout this thesis, extremism pervades the modern landscape due in large part to the externalization of knowledge and the relatively easy access to it. Virtually any extreme Muslim or Christian, for example, can find an avenue and a following for his or her ideas, based upon the double problem of people being desperate for an identity and external knowledge being highly valued. However, to equate Tradition with orthodoxy and authority exclusively is to over-simplify the idea of authority and Tradition, and when socio-political authorities (relatively devoid of the qualities inherent in a spiritual authority) are seen as being valid authorities, this leads to the possibility of a corrupt central authority that dominates and oppresses the lives of the people. It also leads, as we shall see, to historical writing that is focused only upon the rulers and the central authorities, leaving out the important influence of the masses. Yet the people *do* have power and influence, and *should* be written into history as important aspects of the generation of tradition.

Thus, I argue that the balance and relationship between the rulers and the ruled rulers (whether or not we are speaking of human or Divine rulers) is where true authority, and thus true Tradition, is found. In the end, I agree with Guénon that a small, humble elite class which is closest to the Traditional by virtue of their intellect of the *heart and mind* should be the true preservers, producers, and transmitters of Tradition. But this elite cannot be cut off from the people, as the people also serve as producers of tradition.

⁸² For a further discussion of the idea of the varied and changing roles of the elites, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*, (London: Verso, 1983).

It is important here to consider two distinct phases of authority and Tradition. The first exists in how authority and Tradition are generated. Secondly, we can look at how it is institutionalized. The Traditionalists seem mostly concerned with the latter, believing that ‘institutionalized Tradition’ must be held by an elite group who hold authority. I believe this to be true, to guard against those who are not capable of deep inner and outer knowledge. The institutionalization of Tradition must happen at the level of the powerful, for it is here that government and society are created, and it is here that those with great knowledge and wisdom are able to translate the historical circumstance of their age into policy that is just and fair.

By not distinguishing between these two phases of authority (generation and institutionalization) as it relates to Tradition, one might argue that the Traditionalists fail to fully consider the possibility of the interplay of the center and edge as the generative force of tradition. While they may agree with this dialogue between center and edge in theory, Traditionalists in many instances focus too much on the center, perhaps to counteract the forces of modernism that have denied all sense of non-human generated authority. This distinction between the generation and institutionalization of Tradition helps to solve the problem of corruption on the part of the central rulers, as the production of Tradition that happens among the people and in the interplay between the people and the powerful serves as a check against the abuse of power by the elite classes. It also helps to argue against the idea that many people have clear access to authority, which is so common in today’s world and which leads to smaller and smaller factions fighting for narrower and narrower views of the Truth.

I argue that the *inter-relationship* between the rulers and the ruled, or those without authority and those with authority, is what generates authority in Tradition. A strong dichotomy between ‘those who know’ and ‘those who don’t know’ ignores the possibility and, indeed, existence of communication between the two. Authority, then, must come from a blend of the exoteric lives of the people and the esoteric knowledge of the elite. Each generation of people creates its specific, local traditions through its questions, and each generation of elite leaders takes this specific, historical tradition and combines it with the eternal, ahistorical Tradition. This combination allows for a meeting place between our horizontal (*nafs*) and our vertical (*rūḥ*) lives as human beings, and a relationship between the exoteric and the esoteric. In this process, Tradition is generated, institutionalized, and sustained. The people, or the edges, play the part of generating tradition from their lived experience. The elite class thus takes the tradition of the people and turns it into another humble interpretation of Tradition.

In this way, the masses are involved in the production of tradition and form the substance of the elite’s transmission of Tradition. In a world of fast travel, interconnectedness and easy access to communication across borders, a glimpse of the world as it is lived, in small, distinct provinces and neighborhoods, is extremely important. It is in these corners, which make up the majority of the world, that authority and tradition are generated. In short, I argue that authority does not come simply from the center, which is the select group of elite intellectuals, but from an interplay between the intellectual capabilities of the elite and the forces at work on the margins.

Thus, the esoteric and the exoteric revolve around each other, interacting in order to create and maintain Tradition. As I mentioned in the Introduction, I believe the term

esoteric has other connotations than simply ‘of a secret elite group.’ The term comes from the Greek root *esō*, which means ‘within.’ Thus, esoteric has the sense of the *inner*, not just that which is available to only a select few, but related to the idea of the essence or the mystical that is theoretically available to all human beings. This sense of the esoteric is defined by and against the exoteric, or the outer manifestations of the essence. In line with al-Ghazālī’s discussion of how the hidden attributes exist only in relation to the manifest attributes, I argue that the esoteric can be defined only in relation to the exoteric. As such, it is the *relationship* that exists between these two concepts that is the starting point for understanding both.

The Edges in Islam

Now that I have shown that Tradition, generally, comes from an interplay of edge and center, one example of which is interplay between the elite and God and the people and the elite, I will turn to a discussion of the location of the Islamic edges that help in generating tradition. I take a cue from Victor Turner here, who, in trying to get at the essence of the religious, has discussed the concept of *communitas*. He defines *communitas* as “a relational quality of full unmediated communication, even communion, between definite and determinate identities, which arises spontaneously in all kinds of groups, situations, and circumstances” and “an essential and generic human bond.”⁸³ When I speak of the outer and inner dimensions of Islam, part of this distinction includes

⁸³ Victor Turner and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture: Anthropological Perspectives*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 250.

a notion of the essential versus the accidental⁸⁴ and the structured versus the unstructured. Thus, in some senses I am seeking something resembling *communitas* when I attempt to locate the Islamic margins. This *communitas* can be found strongly, according to Turner, in three areas: “liminality, outsiderhood, and structural inferiority.”⁸⁵ In these areas and in their relations to the center, one finds the location of tradition production most clearly.

Historical studies and methodology are a good way to get at the edges in Islam and to prove my theory of Tradition. Thus, I turn to Richard Bulliet, who has argued in his book *Islam: The View from the Edge*,⁸⁶ that most historical constructions of Islam have proceeded from a ‘view from the center,’ which “portrays Islamic history as an outgrowth from a single nucleus, a spreading inkblot labeled the caliphate.”⁸⁷ This view from the center argues for only a socio-political elite group having access to Tradition and authority. While he does not deny the importance and validity of this view, he says this view leaves many questions unanswered, including

Where did all the Muslims come from? Why did they develop a coherent culture or civilization while Europe, despite its Christian homogeneity, was so fractious and diverse? If their society is legitimately tagged with a religious label, what is the role of religion in that society? Whom do people follow? Who responds to their needs?⁸⁸

Thus the ‘view from the center’ doesn’t adequately explain some of the very fundamental questions that need to be answered about the development of the Islamic civilization. These are the questions that are left unanswered if one views Tradition as being only bound to the central authorities and if one does not see that whoever was at the edge yesterday may be at the center tomorrow (as in the case of the Prophet). Bulliet thus

⁸⁴ Taken from Nasr, 1-2.

⁸⁵ Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974), 231.

⁸⁶ Richard Bulliet, *Islam: The View from the Edge*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

⁸⁷ Bulliet, 8.

raises the question of how Islamic history, and the Islamic tradition, was and is generated. He believes that it is generated through individuals and small communities spread across the land, rather than from the centralized power of the capitals. His book argues that the canonical *hadith* (which represent a large portion of Islamic tradition) were created and collected not solely from an elite class, but from questions asked by new Muslim converts of those who held authority. Thus, the historical thrust lies not in decrees from authorities, but history itself is shaped by individuals asking questions about how to live their lives. For Bulliet, it is the questions and answers of how to be a Muslim of the people at the edges that form the center of the Islamic Tradition. Authority, especially historical, seemingly rises from the bottom up, in this view (if we just focus on the questions that in part provide the opportunity for the answers to be given). Nevertheless, it is also the answers in tandem with the questions of the people which form the substance of what creates the tradition, which is then institutionalized by the elites and made into the Islamic Tradition. Bulliet uses these questions and answers as the starting point for his argument in viewing Islam ‘from the edge.’ As he says,

Where the view from the center starts with a political institution, watches it expand mightily, and then observes its dissolution, the view from the edge does the opposite. It starts with individuals and small communities scattered over a vast and poorly integrated realm, speaking over a dozen different languages, and steeped in religious and cultural traditions of great *diversity*. From this unpromising start, an impressive measure of social, institutional, and doctrinal cohesion slowly emerges, the product of immense human effort, but even more of historical currents beyond contemporary perception or control.”⁸⁹

In this view, it is seen as common sense that local populations do not seek the central authority for answers to all of their specific questions. Instead, they seek personal guidance from a local Imam or Sheikh, for example, to speak to their specific

⁸⁸ Bulliet, 7-8.

⁸⁹ Bulliet, 8-9. (italics mine)

circumstances. It is these people on the edge, their questions and answers, and the authorities to whom they look that go into making up the fabric of the Islamic tradition.

Here we experience our first encounter with tension between the Traditionalist viewpoint and the viewpoint of diversity. In the view from the edge, diversity is prioritized above unity. No longer are history and tradition created from the top. Instead, diverse individuals with specific life circumstances generate tradition through questions of how to live their lives. In these answers lies the creativity of the production of tradition. The edge in Islam is generally equated with movement, as it exists among people who are coming into, or going out of, the Islamic tradition. For Bulliet,

The edge in Islamic history exists wherever people make the decision to cross a social boundary and join the Muslim community, either through religious conversion, or, under modern conditions, through nominal Muslims rededicating themselves to Islam as the touchstone of their social identity, or recasting their Muslim identities in a modern urban context.⁹⁰

The edge is thus a fluid landscape, filled with questions and concerns. Far too often, this edge has been viewed as marginally important to the main historical narrative of a given location. This is because the edges are shifty, constantly in motion and thus harder to locate. The stability of the central powers is easier to pinpoint and analyze. Yet this view tends to disregard the dynamic nature of the edge in creating the center.

In my view, the Tradition of the Islamic Revelation speaks to my theory of the two-fold development of Tradition. During the early years, Muhammad received *Suras* of the Qur'an that spoke to the individual soul and its relation to the Divine. As Michael Sells has shown us, the themes of the Meccan *Suras* were generally related to the remembrance of God, the Judgment Day, God's Oneness, and the consequences of personal actions, themes that speak much more to the individual soul than the community

at large.⁹¹ As he says, the Meccan *Suras* “speak most directly to every human being, regardless of religious confession or cultural background.”⁹² This early stage of Revelation is analogous to the stage of the production of tradition among the people. These *Suras* speak to all people and exhibit tolerance for all people who believe. The appearance of Islam did not happen from the centers of power in the Arab or Christian world. Instead, Revelation came to a humble, trustworthy businessman living on the margins in the middle of the desert on the Arabian peninsula.

When Muhammad created the first Traditional Muslim community after the *hijra*, the Revelations of the Qur’an changed to include specific rules, laws and regulations that the new community needed to follow. These Revelations served to further unite the new community as the Tradition (in the form of the Qur’an) was addressing specific questions about how the individual members of the community were to identify and carry themselves as a community. This represents the second stage in the creation of Tradition, when it becomes institutionalized and powerful as it forms the new community out of historical circumstance and Divine Will. In this stage authority is crystallized, and the community sets itself apart from other communities and traditions. Thus, there is a certain *boundary drawing* when it comes to Tradition, a certain way of doing things related to those wisdoms that have passed down through the ages and must continue to be passed down, through a certain type of uniformity. Tradition draws distinct and clear boundaries around the community, marking those who are in and those who are out. Muhammad’s emigration from Mecca to Medina, the primordial community-forming and

⁹⁰ Bulliet, 9.

⁹¹ Michael Sells, *Approaching the Qur’an: The Early Revelations*, (Ashland, Oregon: White Cloud Press, 2002).

⁹² Sells, 4.

time-altering event for Muslims, clearly delineated the Muslim community: beyond certain exceptions, those who had emigrated (*muhajireen*) and those who helped the emigrants in Mecca (*ansars*) were in, all others were not. The Muslims were now unified by faith rather than clan or tribe. The institutionalization of the Islamic Tradition was beginning.

An Example of the View from the Center

Samuel P. Huntington, in his book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, represents an example of the view from the center. Huntington attempts to pit large-scale cultural entities against one another, over-generalizing the varied experiences of the diversity within these entities. Huntington imagines a vast Western civilization that he calls simply ‘the West’ as “in conflict with other civilizations, most seriously with Islam and China.”⁹³ Already Huntington has used the term Islam and China together as if they belong to the same category of ‘civilizations.’ In fact, Huntington is probably aware that China is in fact a modern nation-state with definite leaders, borders, and a relatively homogeneous foreign policy. Islam, on the other hand, is a massive religion of over one billion followers, existing in many countries and in many and various forms from Morocco to Indonesia. It is unhelpful and inaccurate to equate the two. While Huntington makes interesting and thought-provoking points related to the relationship between the Islamic Resurgence and the Protestant Reformation (down to a comparison of John Calvin and Ayatollah Khomeini), the conclusion that he draws – that Islam, because it is experiencing a Resurgence “at least as

⁹³ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, (New York:Simon & Schuster, 1996), 20.

significant as the American Revolution, the French Revolution, or the Russian Revolution...”⁹⁴ creates a monolithic identity out of a vastly diverse Islamic tradition.

In creating these grand civilizations (‘West,’ ‘Islam,’ ‘China,’ ‘Russia,’ etc.), Huntington has created a fantasy world of imagined reality in which these massive forces (civilizations) unite under certain cultural identities and battle each other in an epic cosmic drama. Huntington’s main thesis is that because “cultural identity is what is most meaningful to most people...” in today’s world, “culture and cultural identities, which at the broadest level are civilizational identities, are shaping the patterns of cohesion, disintegration, and conflict in the post-Cold War world.”⁹⁵ Thus, “a civilizational-based world order is emerging.”⁹⁶ The first three maps that are found in his book⁹⁷ set the simplistic, fantasy-like tone for the basic conclusions of his book. In the first, one sees a map entitled “The West and the Rest: 1920” dividing the world up into areas ruled by the West and those independent of the West. Then, we see a map with the heading “The Cold War World: 1960s,” divided into the ‘Free World,’ the ‘Communist Bloc,’ and ‘Unaligned Nations.’ In the final map, “The World of Civilizations: Post-1990,” there is a sudden explosion of nine distinct cultures around the globe by which people identify themselves. These simplistic images are classic examples of the view from the center, in which the identities of billions of people are imagined and created by those in power. It is as if, in the 1920s, people all over the world thought of themselves as either free from the West or not. While it is an important point to recognize that colonialism was a major part of the global world in the early 20th century, it is incorrect to suggest that people in

⁹⁴ Huntington, 109.

⁹⁵ Huntington, 20.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Huntington, 22-27.

those times didn't identify with their religious and cultural traditions. According to this map, to ask a man in Brazil what he believed his identity to be, he would exclaim gleefully, "I am free from the West!" rather than "I am Brazilian" or "Catholic" or any other identity.

The view from the center, as Huntington shows us, is inaccurate because it lumps massive numbers of individuals into simplistic categories. For Huntington, and for many foreign policy makers in America, the belief is that people identified mostly with their status in relation to the West up until the 1990s, at which time this new 'Clash of Civilizations' emerged and people began to identify with their cultural roots. This attitude ignores the vast majority of the world which lives far from the centers of political power, and over-emphasizes a narrative of human history that is focused entirely upon the center. The view from the center, then, imagines a history that is oppressive in nature, for it names all others according to its own language. It is truly hard to imagine that the identity of people all over the globe in the early 20th century was based on their relationship to the West. Huntington's book serves as a perfect example of the danger of a view from the center, which starts with grouped-together, abstract entities that rule over the world. This view ignores diversity, difference, and the possibility of change on all except the largest of levels. It creates a black and white world where the enemy is clear and simply understood. The margins, this 'Other,' exist as the destabilizing force in an otherwise stable world. To speak of a 'Clash of Civilizations' is an attempt to simplify a complicated, constantly shifting world into black and white explanations.

Huntington's controversial notion that Islam has bloody borders is an extension of this faulty line of reasoning. Again, the view from the center views *all of Islam* as

monolithic, static, and thus guilty of violence, warfare, and destabilization. Huntington's data is sound: certainly there has been a great deal of strife, warfare, and violence in the 'Muslim world' over the past century. However, his conclusion is strikingly ignorant: he takes all of this data and concludes that the religion of Islam must be at fault for all of these things. In a clear and powerful essay on Huntington's ideas, Roy Mottahedeh persuasively argues against the premises of *The Clash of Civilizations*. First of all, Mottahedeh says, Huntington unfairly equates "Arab" and "Islamic," arguing that Huntington knows better. The larger point is one that has already been made: Islam is not a monolithic entity, but a dynamic, diverse religious tradition that exists all over the world. As Mottahedeh says, "Is it possible that, in spite of being fellow Muslims, the Muslims of South Asia and the Muslims of Turkey have a different political culture than Arab Muslims? I believe the case that they do have such individual political cultures to be overwhelming."⁹⁸ He goes on to argue that Huntington forgets the historical context when arguing that Islam and free markets don't go together, saying "The overwhelming majority of the pre-Ottoman Islamic societies of the Middle East were free market economies."⁹⁹

Thus Samuel Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations* serves to marginalize the diversity of individual Muslims. Two examples will suffice here. First, Huntington, in trying to prove the inherent militarism of Islam, argues that because the military force ratios (the number of military people per 1000 citizens) are higher in Muslim countries, Islam obviously has bloody borders and is inherently violent. Huntington ignores all context here, without even mentioning the historical context for why these nation-states

⁹⁸ Roy P. Mottahedeh, "The Clash of Civilizations: An Islamist's Critique," *Harvard Middle Eastern and Islamic Review*, 2 (1995) 1: 1-26, p. 5.

might possibly be built up more militarily than other countries. The logic is much like arguing that the United States is inherently connected to militarism from a sample of the number of military personnel per person after Pearl Harbor. Secondly, Huntington does not even factor in the notion that these militaries were created by governments and not by the people. Again, this is much like viewing the modern day situation in Iran and arguing that it is an undemocratic, strictly Islamic, terrorism-filled nation. While its current leaders may be extreme in their views, a *vast majority* of the people disagrees with this position as evidenced by recent elections.

Huntington has thus tapped into many of the themes discussed in Edward Said's *Orientalism*. Interestingly, Huntington addresses Said directly, agreeing with Said's point that the 'East' is a multi-dimensional, dynamic entity that many in the past have simply lumped together into one. It appears that Huntington understands Said when he says, "The polarization of 'East' and 'West' culturally is in part another consequence of the universal but unfortunate practice of calling European civilization Western civilization."¹⁰⁰ However, Huntington then proceeds throughout the book to find himself guilty of similar points raised by Orientalists, because his argument represents (in extreme fashion) the view from the center, which ignores the importance of the diversity of Islam.

Samuel P. Huntington's book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, serves as the perfect example of a view from the center. Huntington imagines a video game-like clash between monstrous forces, 'the West and the rest,' and creates these other monolithic civilizations, like Islam, in order to generalize the Islamic

⁹⁹ Mottahedeh, p. 9.

world and create Islam as an ‘Other.’ As he says, “The survival of the West depends on Americans reaffirming their Western identity and Westerners accepting their civilization as unique not universal and uniting to renew and preserve it against challenges from non-Western societies.”¹⁰¹ In the view from the center, those in power attempt to pretend that they are the only ones making history, both in how they conduct themselves and in how they write history. This false pride however, is a perfect example of human beings taking the exoteric (temporal worldly power) and leaving behind the esoteric (eternal, Sacred power), forgetting the connection between the two and thus being cut off from the Sacred Source of humility and true success.

For the scholar, the view from the center is especially problematic. In the end, this view accepts the generated truth of the powerful by creating and blaming monolithic ‘Others’ for creating instability in the world. Edward Said’s *Orientalism* is so important, in part, because it exposes the notion that the scholar, even (and especially) in the post-modern world, 1) has *responsibility* for what he/she says and 2) is intimately connected to those in power. The view from the center, in life and in scholarship, while necessary, is questionable for its inability to understand the complexity and diversity of any given tradition. This view attempts to tell people’s history for them, without asking them how it really was. It also cuts off the important interplay between those with knowledge (and thus answers) and those without knowledge (and thus questions).

In short, by adopting the view from the center, which is almost exclusively interested in studying what the rulers said and did, one takes away, veils, or discounts the transmission of Tradition, knowledge and authority that takes place in the relationship

¹⁰⁰ Huntington, 33.

between the center and the edge. By taking away the authority of the transmission of knowledge (in attacks on the reliability of Islamic sources by Orientalists, for example), the very authority of the Islamic tradition is taken away, externalized, and forced through the meat grinder of the modern skeptic's secular categories of inquiry. It is this transmission itself which is so important in the development of the Islamic tradition. In contrast, by studying those *not* in power - the small individuals and communities that don't make the news, the unstable, the transitory, the very places where the shifting of boundaries occurs extremely frequently - one is able to get a more clear view of the past and present, a view that incorporates less polemic and more understanding, that is less aggrandizing and more humility, and one that is less disparaging and more accepting.

Conclusion

In the absence of Divine Authority, human beings have the responsibility of following Tradition, that which has withstood changing historical circumstance and has proven its similarity to the Eternal. Tradition is that which has, in a sense, defeated time and the temporal nature of the world. These are the traces of the eternal and the Divine to which human beings must hold fast in order to live justly and humbly. The difficult question is, who best knows and can use this Tradition? For Traditionalists, the answer is an elite that best understands and can interpret and put into practice God's Will. But then what are the checks to absolute authority? If we argue that Tradition and authority should be placed into the hands of *all* the people, the rise of sectarianism and extremism is very likely. James Madison knew this all too well, and thus argued in favor of the new Constitution of the United States as a centralizing authority, saying that "a well

¹⁰¹ Huntington, 21.

constructed Union” is vital in its “tendency to break and control the violence of faction.”¹⁰² Thus, easy access to authority leads to a lack of depth in intellectuality and the rise of factions claiming authority without any basis in knowledge or Tradition.

Authority, and its role in generating Tradition, is a two-part process. First, it is generated among the people, on the margins, and in the majority by the masses who ask questions that help to shape the local tradition. But, of course, these people have relatively impaired access to knowledge of Tradition, which is subtle and complex, and inherently must rest in the hands of an elite few. Thus, authority given to the masses without the check of scholarship, depth of intellect and deep inquiry leads to extreme factions claiming to know the Truth and to have authority and the ‘true Tradition’ with no depth to their claims, and no sense of the inner knowledge obtained only from oral transmission, long years of study, strict communal standards and gnosis (which is the main source of inner knowledge for the Traditionalists). These foundation-less sects, like the Wahhabis in Islam, are forced to be more and more extreme in their views in order to win over the people who, with the loss of the Sacred, are ripe for conversion and following blindly due to their lack of identity. The current state of the modern world is filled with such groups.

The second part of the process is the institutionalization of Tradition, in which the elite few gather together the voices of the masses - their questions and answers - and, through their depth of knowledge concerning the Divine and the Eternal, create (or discover!) what is known as the Tradition. Power figures who are totally disconnected from the people, which is the view from the center, end up corrupt in their power, as their

¹⁰² James Madison, *The Federalist: A Commentary on the Constitution of the United States*, “Federalist #

disconnect from the humility of the poor, the marginalized, the transient and the rural, leads them to inevitably abuse their powers. The modern world is also filled with this view, in the form of powerful dictators and also scholars who externalize all knowledge and write only about the center in constructing historical, political and religious narratives.

A healthy view of Tradition incorporates both aspects discussed above. The people form a significant degree of the generative power and substance of tradition and authority, even though their knowledge is not the same as the elite. The masses should be checked by the humble intellectuals who study and pass on the time-tested Traditions that have existed throughout eternity. These elites should have ultimate authority in sustaining Tradition, but only when they listen to the voices of the people. The view from the center, and an over-emphasis on those in power, is inaccurate if taken to the extreme, in that it creates vast, monolithic categories that ignore the diversity of the local people and the relationship they have to the center. Many Western scholars of Islam are guilty of this type of construction whereby only the external, material and simplistic meaning is studied, and the depth of the Tradition is intentionally ignored. The very categories of East and West, while useful to an extent and ingrained in everyone's mind, are results of this view of Tradition that creates large categories out of diverse groups in an extreme fashion.

Traditionalist scholars have much to draw from in the Islamic tradition that points to the importance of this dialogue between the rulers and the ruled. Traditional Islamic concepts of consultation (*shurah*) and consensus (*ijma*) stress the importance of a

10" (New York: The Modern Library, no copyright), 53.

dialogue between the elites and the masses. The Qur'an itself implores Muhammad to consult his Companions in important matters, saying "take counsel with them in the affair[s]" (3:159). Further, there is a hadith which discusses how Muhammad passed by some people planting trees who complained to him that their yield was low because they had listened to his advice. Muhammad responds by saying "You have better knowledge (of a technical skill) in the affairs of the world."¹⁰³ All of these examples suggest that there is a dialogue inherent in the Islamic tradition, and many Traditionalists affirm this point. However, in many instances, Traditionalists do not fully develop and emphasize the importance of this dialogue in the Islamic tradition. Instead focusing upon the elites as holders of authority. This is done most likely to counteract modernism's insistence on individualism and the loss of any sense of Transcendent authority.

In my view, we must study the weak to understand the strong, the humble to understand the arrogant, and the powerless to understand the roots and discords of power as such. We must study the diversity of the Islamic Tradition in order to understand its unity. This does not mean, of course, that we go so far as to say that Islam has no centralizing authority, and that all that exists are little Islams with no center. This is extremism borne of a lack of understanding of the esoteric truths understood by those who have a depth of knowledge not available to all. On the other hand, it is not correct to say that the Islamic Tradition is a monolithic entity, explainable in broad, external categories. This extreme ignores the influence of its individual people and the importance of diversity in creating the unity of the center. I believe the edges and the

¹⁰³ Translation of Sahih Muslim, Book 30, *Number* 5832. Translated by Abdul Hamid Siddiqui.

center work together in their dialogue, discussion and debate as partners in creating Tradition.

The world today is fragmented by ethnic nationalism and loose boundaries. Precisely because of this, I argue that history must be researched and written not only from and about those bastions of power and stability that create macro-history, but also from those communities ‘on the edge,’ that create micro-history. It is the duty and necessity of each new generation to interpret the vague whispers of history based upon the basic structure of its own society. To live in a fragmented world of questionable and ever-changing borders where power and population are less centralized and human beings are more mobile and less provincial is the starting point for a view of history that is based more on the marginalized, powerless people, who, beyond the decrees and wars of larger humans, make up the bulk of the stuff of history. History that excludes the transitory and the unstable is history that leaves out a significant portion of what makes up the Tradition of a place. Thus, history without the marginal masses is like geography without rivers. It is on these margins, from the friction of people migrating and cultures meeting, that historical studies can find fertile ground.

What is fascinating about Islam is that while its structure is loose and true centralization never occurred in the same way that it did in the Catholic Church, nonetheless there is a certain homogeneity that pervades Islam in all of its corners. For example, Arabic is still the only language considered as authoritative for the Qur’an. Further, most new converts to Islam, whether in America or Africa or Asia, generally take a ‘Muslim’ name. These threads of Tradition have survived an Islam that has become extremely diverse in its language, race, and geography. While there exists no

centralized leader of all Muslims across the globe, the similarities in the practice of Islam are striking. This is not to say, however, that Islam is monolithic in nature.

While there are certain similarities and traditions that exist across Islamic borders, there are also major differences. These centralized practices exist alongside the more diverse and local traditions. As Bulliet argues,

Every student of Islam knows of local beliefs and practices that deviate more or less substantially from what is taught in the *madrasas* of Cairo and Mecca. Sometimes they refer to them as ‘little’ traditions, as opposed to the ‘great tradition’ preserved and propounded by authoritative scholars and embodied in time-honored texts. Though anthropologists often view them as important religious and social phenomena, historians more often ignore them.¹⁰⁴

These “little” traditions, the traditions of local Islam all across the world, are far too often ignored in favor of the “great tradition” as the main shaper of the Islamic Tradition. The outward, exoteric forms of Islam as seen in the centers of power in the Islamic world are emphasized while the hidden, esoteric dimensions of the Tradition – which consist of the relationship between the center and the edges – are ignored. In their fight against the danger of modernism’s attempt to invalidate Tradition, Traditionalists have often over-emphasized the need to recover the authority of a gnostic elite. This should not, however, lead us to believe that Tradition also ignores or opposes a dynamic interrelationship between the center and edges. Instead, Tradition asserts strongly the importance of this dialogic relationship. In the gaze toward the hidden - a re-searching, a remembering, a re-emergence of the esoteric truths of humility, compassion, and gratefulness – we can find the ability to change our course from the selfish annihilation of the Modern world to the self-less annihilation in God of the Sufis. It would be wise begin this course by

¹⁰⁴ Bulliet, 185.

looking at those who embody these traits of compassion: the marginalized, the forgotten, the ones struggling to survive, holding on to the thankfulness of a Most Gracious God.

CHAPTER 3

SUFISM IN THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE: FOUNDATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS AND
HISTORICAL ERASURE

In this chapter I will pursue further my analysis of tradition in Islam by looking at the role that the Sufi orders played in the Ottoman Empire as well as the ways in which (and degrees to which) these orders have been erased from history. I argue that in defining the Islamic tradition in the Ottoman Empire, we should focus on the major role and influence of the Sufi orders in the Empire and the fact that this influence has been de-emphasized and marginalized in many major accounts of the Ottoman Empire.¹⁰⁵ The intent of this discussion is to explore the hidden historical influences of Sufism in the Ottoman Empire and to attempt to formulate an answer as to why these traces were (and still are) marginalized not only within modern Turkey but, consequently, in historical accounts of the Empire. For the most part, the Sufi orders of the Ottoman Empire have come to be viewed historically as an aspect of the Empire to be discussed in a separate chapter as almost an after-thought. On the contrary, I argue that the Sufi orders played a large role in the Ottoman Empire in the realms of politics, the military, social life, the economy, and religious thought and life. Ultimately, it is my belief that historical accounts of the Ottoman Empire are helped by understanding that the mystical tradition

¹⁰⁵ See, for example, the two major works analyzed in this chapter, Halil Inalcik, *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age 1300-1600*, translated by Norman Itzkowitz and Colin Imber, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973) and Stanford Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey, Vols. I and II*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

of Islam is woven into the very fabric of Ottoman, and Islamic, history throughout the years.

The goal of this chapter is not to present exhaustive research on the Sufi intellectual tradition of all of the Sufi orders in the Ottoman Empire. Indeed, there was a tremendous diversity of what might be called ‘Sufic’ in the Empire, and this diversity must be remembered throughout the course of this discussion.¹⁰⁶ For example, John P. Brown, writing an extensive catalogue of Sufi orders in the Ottoman Empire in 1867, names in his Appendix III a total of thirteen active Sufi orders in Constantinople at the time.¹⁰⁷ Each of the thirteen orders has multiple convents with different days “on which they perform their exercises for the guidance of curious visitors.”¹⁰⁸ Some orders, like the Khalwatiyya, were de-centralized in their structure and encouraging of individualism.¹⁰⁹ Others, like the Bektāşi, “maintained a strong central organization.”¹¹⁰ While some orders, like the Bektāşis, claimed to be Sunni yet displayed many Shi’i tendencies, other orders, like the Naqshbandis, were strictly Sunni and were important to Sunni Islam in the Empire. Some orders were more orthodox and others were more heterodox.

With all of this diversity in mind, I nonetheless believe that certain general conclusions can be drawn about the nature of the influence of the Sufis on the Ottoman Empire. As such, I will present a broad picture of the influence of the Sufis - their orders,

¹⁰⁶ Among the many Sufi groups were: Bayrami, Bedevi, Bektāşi, Celveti, Gülşeni, Halveti-Cerrahi, Halveti-Şabani, Halveti-Sinani- Halveti-Sünbūli, Halveti-Uşaki, Kadiri, Melami, Mevlevi, Nakşbandi, Rufai, Sa’di, Şazili, and Zeyni.

¹⁰⁷ John P. Brown, *The Darvishes or Oriental Spiritualism*, (London: Frank Cass and Co., 1968). (originally published in 1868), 459-483.

¹⁰⁸ Brown, 459.

¹⁰⁹ J. Spencer Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 74.

¹¹⁰ Trimingham, 80.

organization, and beliefs – on the Empire as a whole, attempting to show the vital connections that existed between Sufis and the *ulama*¹¹¹, Sufis and peasants, Sufis and Ottoman royalty, Sufis and merchants, Sufis and non-Muslims, etc. In short, I will show the breadth and depth of *relationship* that the different Sufi orders had with all levels of the Ottoman Empire, implicitly arguing that in this relationship one finds the central role that the Sufis played within the Empire.

I do not mean to suggest by this argument that the Sufi orders were never marginalized in the Empire. On the contrary, the orders were many times pushed out from the center forcefully by government leaders, the *ulama* and ultra-conservative movements. What I am suggesting is that the very process of acceptance \Rightarrow marginalization \Rightarrow acceptance \Rightarrow marginalization of the Sufis in the Empire participated in the shape, integrity, and force of Islam in the Ottoman Empire. Further, I will argue that historical writing must be open to this process, and open to both the inner and outer dimensions of its subject (history itself), its sources, and its biases. Historical studies that begin with the assumption that only empirical evidence can be used to reconstruct Ottoman history will necessarily find what they are looking for: the exoteric aspects of the Empire. In beginning with the idea that there is more than empirical evidence to be found, there will naturally follow more than empirical conclusions. One important way of viewing Ottoman history is by taking the Ottomans on their own terms, looking toward the inner and outer manifestations of the Empire.

¹¹¹ I will use the standard Arabic transliteration rules rather than the Turkish ones in this chapter, so as to cohere with the rest of the thesis, for everything except when I am quoting others and in particularly common instances such as Bektāşi.

This chapter will thus be divided into two sections. First, I will argue that Sufism (Sufi practices, beliefs, social structures, worship, etc.) played a major role in the origins, growth, and survival of the Ottoman Empire, expressing itself in a wide variety of locations, people, and historical time periods of the Empire. To better understand the multi-layered subtlety of the Ottoman Empire, historical studies can be aided by accepting the relationships between the inner and the outer dimensions of the Empire. Instead of simply being a marginalized community of Islam, Sufism sits in the middle of the stage in the Ottoman Empire, creating and being created by the Islamic center. As Ira Lapidus argues, “Within Islam, Sufism is at once a particular and distinctive version of Islam and yet integral to every manifestation of Islam” and further, “in dialectical relationship, Sufism is both a distinctive form of belief and practice and an integral aspect of the whole religious system of Islam.”¹¹² It is these Sufi brotherhoods, I argue, that, through their interactions with the Ottoman people on an everyday level and with orthodox Islam (in the form agreements and disagreements), helped *structure* Ottoman society and create the Islamic tradition in the Ottoman Empire.

Secondly, I will analyze the degrees to which, and the reasons why, Sufism has been erased from Ottoman history. I will look at two historical accounts of the Ottoman Empire (Halil Inalcik’s *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age 1300-1600*¹¹³ and Stanford Shaw’s *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*¹¹⁴) arguing that they have consciously and unconsciously proceeded from the basic assumption of a clear

¹¹² Ira Lapidus, “Sufism and Ottoman Islamic Society,” in *The Dervish Lodge: Architecture, Art and Sufism in Ottoman Turkey*, ed. Raymond Lifchez, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 16.

¹¹³ Halil Inalcik, *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age 1300-1600*, translated by Norman Itzkowitz and Colin Imber, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973).

¹¹⁴ Stanford Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey, Vols. I and II*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

dichotomy between Islamic mysticism and Islamic orthodoxy. As such, these works have marginalized the great influence that Sufi thought, organization, and actions had on all realms of the Empire (political, military, social, educational, economic, etc.). I will look at several reasons for this erasure. The extreme *re-imagining* of Turkish history by the Kemalist regime in the early 20th century, culminating with the official closing of the *tekkes* (a word used to designate Sufi hospices in Ottoman realms) in 1926, began the erasure of the Sufis from Ottoman memory. Although this was the physical manifestation of the government's attempts at removal of the Sufi orders from Turkey, there were deeper structures that were fundamentally shifted, including the nature of how knowledge was legitimized, how power was related to knowledge, and how colonialism and Western domination in Turkey affected this discourse. This was due to, among other things, Western military domination, the influence of Western Orientalism (as argued by Edward Said in *Orientalism*) and factors within Islam itself. In many ways, then, this chapter is not about how history is written, but more about how it is erased, although in the end there may be very little distinction between the two.

Methodology

Several issues must be clarified before a discussion of Sufi orders in the Ottoman Empire can begin. These issues will help to clarify the terms that I use and basic assumptions that this discussion will proceed from. Interestingly, most of these issues surround dichotomies of thought (center/edge, orthodox/heterodox, urban/rural) that need to be analyzed and unpacked for the present discussion. First, I would like to mention briefly the center/edge theory mentioned in the last chapter and discuss how the focus of this chapter is on the religious center, as opposed to political, military or economic

centers. Second, I would like to discuss defining this religious center, or orthodoxy, as it relates to Sufism and heterodoxy, and to analyze how the distinction between these two is actually not as clear as it seems. Third, I would like to explore the distinction between high Islam and popular Islam, so common among many scholars of Islam. Again, I will argue that a strict dichotomy between these two poles ignores the interaction between the two. Following from this point will be my fourth point, in which I will focus upon the urban/rural distinction made by many studying the Ottoman Empire and how this distinction both helps and impedes historical studies. I will end with a clarification of several key terms that are used in relation to Islam and Sufism, including Sufi, dervish, esoteric and mystic. This clarification will hopefully sharpen the focus and argument of the rest of the chapter.

First and foremost, the basic premise of this chapter is that it is extremely helpful to get beyond the current status of the field of historical inquiry concerning the Ottomans, which focuses largely on the powerful center. In this view, Ottoman history is written only with an eye toward how the powerful figures shape the Empire's history. This 'top down' view speaks only of sultans and *ulama* and conquest and ignores or marginalizes all else. In the following discussion, I take my cue from Richard Bulliet, who argues for a 'view from the edge' rather than a 'view from the center.' Much of this was discussed in the first chapter, but it is helpful to remember that Bulliet argues that the 'view from the center' focuses upon those in power and composes a historical narrative around these central figures.

Bulliet's notion of the 'view from the center' is eerily similar to the classic structuring of Ottoman history, which begins with a powerful figure (Osman), expands

greatly to Suleyman's time, and enters a long period of decline. I believe a more accurate view of Ottoman history will emerge from this 'view from the edge,' in which the diverse small communities of the Empire, like some the Sufi orders, are the focus (although it must be said that at certain time in the Ottoman Empire, orders such as the Mevleviye were at the center and not on the edges). The Ottoman Empire was extremely diverse in culture, religion, language, race and geography at its apex, and it is this diversity that can be the starting point for fascinating and revealing historical studies.

The 'view from the edge,' then, begins with the assumption that diversity is dynamic. When I begin from the idea of looking at the diversity of the edges rather than the unity of the center, I also want to move beyond this point to look at the relationship between the two. Thus I am interested in looking at history as the interplay between the center and the edges. Because of this, I must discuss some of the basic dichotomies that have existed around the Ottoman Empire in order to move beyond such dualistic thinking. In so doing, I argue that a study of the relationship between these various categories, and of the Sufi orders and the religious orthodoxy in general, is extremely helpful at getting at the inner workings of the Ottoman Empire.

The first dichotomy that I would like to address is the one between the center and the edge. The focus of this chapter is on the religious center, as opposed to political, military or economic centers. A majority of historical narratives on the Ottoman Empire begin with a view from the political center. As Suraiya Faroqhi and Fikret Anadir argue, "Down to the present day, Turkish historians have followed the cues given by their Ottoman predecessors and have shown a strong predilection for the study of the Ottoman

center.”¹¹⁵ This suggests that this focus upon the study of the center began during the Ottoman period and continues even today. In introducing a book devoted in great part to the Ottoman Empire as experienced in Greece, the Balkans, and Hungary (among other places), the contributors to this book are using the term ‘center’ to be synonymous with the centralized administration of the Ottoman state, and ‘periphery’ as the local governments of the outer provinces of the Empire. Thus, the editors are making the important distinction between the over-emphasized focus of writing history about Istanbul and the under-represented influence of writing history about the Ottoman provinces. I believe this to be an important point, and this discussion will proceed with a similar distinction. However, instead of using the term ‘center’ to represent only the Ottoman administration, my argument will be focused on the *religious* center, made up of those religious figures in the Empire who were responsible for formalizing and centralizing Islam in the Empire.

Of course, the immediate problem that arises when one speaks of the religious center is, What *is* this religious center? One cannot proceed with a discussion of how the Sufi orders related to (and helped create) the religious center in Islam without a working definition of this center. In general, I use the term synonymously with ‘orthodoxy,’ as the Islamic orthodoxy in the Ottoman Empire tended to be those who created the mainstream doctrine of Islam. The Islamic orthodoxy, however, is very difficult to name, because it existed in various religious groups, classes, and geographic and religious locations within the Empire. Certainly, whatever orthodoxy was in the Empire came from the *ulama*. Interestingly, however, the category of *ulama* does not in any way

¹¹⁵ Firket Adanir and Suraiya Faroqhi, *The Ottomans and the Balkans: A Discussion of Historiography*, (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 5.

exclude the Sufi tradition. As Madeline Zilfi has stated that “many *ulama* [were] habitués of Sufi lodges”¹¹⁶ and “in the somewhat wider view of the Ottoman *ulama* generally, esotericism, albeit still within bounds, nonetheless offered an enlightening perspective on the same ultimate reality [that they were seeking].”¹¹⁷

Sufi orders had as much if not more legitimacy in the Ottoman Empire as authority figures. Because of this fact, many Sufi orders were included under the umbrella of the *ulama*. As Richard Bulliet has pointed out, the term ‘*ulama* is extremely broad, being derived from the Arabic verb ‘*alima* (‘to know’) which gives space for the terms ‘*ālim* (‘knower’) and ‘*ilm* (‘science’), and encompassing those who studied hadith, Qur’an, Muhammad, *fiqh*, as well as those who recited, read and memorized the Qur’an. In the end, it is the *ulama* who claim and are granted authority over religious matters in Islam. Ernest Gellner has emphasized this point by saying that *ulama* are “the norm-givers of the community of the faithful; they are the repositories and arbiters of legitimacy.”¹¹⁸

Because the *ulama* are generally seen as authorities, and because the *ulama* included many Sufis, the conclusion is that many Sufi orders in the Ottoman Empire were seen as centers of authority. Thus, Bulliet concludes, “the *ulama* represent religious authority based on learning” and included “priests, ascetics, or Sufis.”¹¹⁹ We are reminded of the discussion of authority in Chapter Two, and the importance of authority in relation to Tradition. Clearly, the Sufi orders held a respected and accepted place of

¹¹⁶ Madeline Zilfi, *The Politics of Piety: The Ulema in the Postclassical Age (1600-1800)*, (Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1988), 14.

¹¹⁷ Zilfi, 35.

¹¹⁸ Ernest Gellner, “Doctor and Saint,” in *Scholars, Saints and Sufis*, ed. Nikki Keddie, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 308.

authority for individuals and the community at large in the Ottoman Empire. Muslims living in the Ottoman Empire looked to both *ulama* and the Sufi orders for answers to their questions and assumed them to be authority figures. As Gellner tells us, “large segments of Muslim populations look not only, and not so much, toward the *ulama* for spiritual guidance, as they do toward other types of religiously significant groups whom there is a tendency to lump together under the heading of Sufism.”¹²⁰ While this statement begins with the premise that Sufism and the *ulama* were separate and distinct entities, it ends up proving the point that there was a fluidity of religious authority in the Ottoman Empire. People looked to the Sufi orders for answers as much or more than the *ulama*, and thus legitimacy was granted to the Sufi orders by the people. Immediately the clear distinction between Sufi and *ulama* becomes less clear, as Sufis become included (in most, but not all, instances) within the category of *ulama*. This leads Michael Winter to conclude, “The *ulama* class was permeated with Sufism to such an extent that the distinction between the two categories is sometimes difficult to define.”¹²¹

The relationship between orthodoxy and heterodoxy is another dichotomy that needs exploration. It is important to keep in mind that there was great diversity in orthodoxy and in the Sufi orders in the Ottoman Empire that blurs the line between the orthodox and the heterodox. Islamic orthodoxy in a small town on the Mediterranean would be very different from Islamic orthodoxy in Baghdad. Thus, Islamic orthodoxy itself sometimes had characteristics of heterodoxy. On the other hand, Islamic orthodoxy in many instances, constituted the norm in Islamic society, and orthodoxy was used as a

¹¹⁹ Bulliet, 105.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ Michael Winter, *Society and Religion in Early Ottoman Egypt: Studies in the Writings of ‘Abd al-Wahhab al-Sha’rani*, (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1982), 30.

measure for what it meant to be a good Muslim. In this way, Islamic orthodoxy existed on a continuum ranging from highly normative and orthodox to highly diversified and heterodox.

Likewise, Sufi practices ranged from being closer to orthodoxy in some locations to being decidedly heterodox in other places. Due to both the vast range of authority of the Sufi orders and the diversity that existed among the Sufi orders,¹²² it is too simplistic to equate Sufism in the Ottoman Empire only with heterodoxy. As Zilfi says, “Some of their [Sufi] numbers were *madrassa* (religious school) graduates or more legalitarian in any case, but many individuals and entire orders recruited widely among the population, lettered or unlettered, and tailored their rituals to a popular following and fervor.”¹²³ Sufis existed in both well-established Orders, sanctioned (or at least allowed to exist) by the ruling *ulama* and the Ottoman government, and in more ‘heterodox’ groups outside of the ‘norm.’ Zilfi goes on to argue that this diversity within Sufism is one of the reasons that many Ottoman writers tend to use the term ‘Sufi’ synonymously with those groups who followed the established Orders, and to use the term ‘dervish’ to denote “those with less acceptable credentials.”¹²⁴ While these figures might be argued to exist outside of the realm of Sufism in their incorporation of non-Muslim beliefs, as has been discussed (and will be discussed further), a rigid division between heterodox dervishes (especially in the countryside) and more orthodox Sufi orders (especially in the cities) is unfair. Instead, just like between Sufism and orthodoxy, there is a great deal of flow between orthodox and heterodox Sufism. Ménage provides an excellent example of this flow, arguing for a process whereby local Turkish holy men are brought into the orthodoxy by later

¹²² See p. 2 for more on this diversity.

¹²³ Zilfi, 14.

historians. While these Turkish holy figures begin as local leaders of communities combining Islamic beliefs and practices with local beliefs and practices, she argues, over time, they tend to become legendary in their status, and later historians imagine them as “founder[s] of a sub-order.”¹²⁵ There is thus the “tendency for such figures to become thoroughly orthodox in the eyes of the later ages...”¹²⁶ This process of bringing these Sufis (sometimes fairly heterodox in their practices) into orthodox Islam is consistent with my overall argument of the fluid borders that existed between the Sufis of the Empire and the Islamic orthodoxy. Sufis were not only poor ascetics, not only whirling dervishes, not only established community leaders, not only members of the Ottoman government, but all of these and more.

This diversity on both sides suggests again that monolithic categories of ‘Sufi,’ ‘heterodox’ and ‘orthodox,’ while helpful to some extent, are incomplete. The complexities of identity of Sufism and orthodoxy in the Ottoman Empire leads to the conclusion that these two concepts were not as distinct as one might first believe. The borders between those who claimed to be orthodox and those who claimed to be Sufi were loose and constantly shifting as both groups had authority, both cohered in their standard of being knowledgeable scholars, and both were extremely diverse in their manifestations.

In many instances, the assumption of difference between Sufi orders and orthodoxy in the Ottoman Empire leads to equating orthodoxy with ‘high, courtly’ Islam existing in the urban centers and Sufism with ‘popular’ Islam,’ existing only in the rural

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ V.L. Ménage, “The Islamization of Anatolia,” in *Conversion to Islam*, ed. Nehemia Levtzion, (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1979), 61.

areas. This high/courtly Islam vs. folk/popular Islam paradigm forms the foundation of many historical, political and religious analyses of the Islamic world. This dichotomy, however, is problematic because it does not allow for the very important back-and-forth flow that exists between these two poles. Yet, for many, the term Sufi is a sharply delineated group of mostly marginal figures who practiced a ‘peasant’ Islam that was, at best, heterodox. As Ira Lapidus argues early on in his article “Muslim Cities and Islamic Societies,” fraternal organizations such as “Sufi brotherhoods, youth clubs, and criminal gangs... were marginal to the rest of society and fell short of providing a basis for the integration of the populations as a whole into a single community.”¹²⁷ He goes on to say that those who did provide this integration were the *ulama*, who “administered the social and economic as well as the purely religious aspects of Muslim town life.”¹²⁸ This type of writing comes from the center, and marginalizes all that was outside of this center. The underlying theme of popular Islam versus high Islam, or heterodox Islam versus orthodox Islam, is an important distinction that can be very helpful in exploring the many dimensions of Islam. But it can also tend toward a rigid border that is never crossed by either side. The popular remains popular, associated only with heterodox, diverse, mystical movements generally found in history among the peasant class. High Islam remains in the realm of the courtly, removed from the people and the sole category of pure, authoritative Islam.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ Ira Lapidus, “Muslim Cities and Islamic Societies,” in *Middle Eastern Cities: A Symposium on Ancient, Islamic, and Contemporary Middle Eastern Urbanism*, ed. Ira Lapidus, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 50. Later publications by Lapidus, including *A History of Islamic Societies*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), suggest that he in fact changed his stance on this position to note that Sufi orders and shaykhs were often very active in administering (like the *ulama*) to the various needs of the community, especially in feeding the people and in the social functions of Sufi orders.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

In many ways, the very distinction between peasants and the courtly life is one imagined by scholars of the Ottoman Empire, created in the hope of further explaining the complicated workings of the Ottoman Empire but also serving to divide and marginalize Sufism and the peasant life. History must choose a center in order to cohere, and in so doing must also marginalize all that is not in the center. Far too often the categories created for the center and the edge do not speak to the complexity of both categories. For example, as Madeline Zilfi has shown, extreme anti-Sufism (like the Wahhabis) should actually be included in the same category of ‘popular religion’ as Sufism because they appeal to the masses in similar ways.¹²⁹ Thus, under this dichotomy, the Sufi orders and the Wahhabis share many things in common. While there are valid points here, it is also very close to ignoring the historical fact that Wahhabism and Sufism are nothing alike, and in fact exist on opposite ends of the spectrum. This ‘popular’ nature of ultra-orthodox movements like the Wahhabis and the fluid relationship between Sufis and *ulama* complicates the distinction between high and popular Islam. While the distinction between popular and courtly Islam is helpful, it is also helpful to view how these two groups of people interacted.

As has been briefly alluded to, a distinction between popular Islam and courtly Islam can lead to a dichotomy between urban and rural Islam. I argue that this urban-rural distinction, parallel to the Sufi/orthodoxy distinction, is far too sharply demarcated in many instances, allowing little room for discussion of the interactions among the multiple identities that existed in the Ottoman Empire both in the cities and in the countryside. Gellner helps us again in this discussion, distinguishing between ‘urban’

¹²⁹ Zilfi, 15.

Sufism –which he argues is an “*alternative* to the legalistic, restrained, arid Islam of the ‘*ulama*’ - and ‘rural/tribal’ Sufism – which tends to be not simply an alternative to the views of the ‘*ulama*, but a *replacement*, or *substitute*, for them.”¹³⁰ Interestingly, the classic view of medieval Muslim cities, as argued by Ira Lapidus, is one in which they are “self-contained entities which comprise a distinct society and culture, radically different from and opposed to that of the peasantry.”¹³¹ Lapidus, however, makes a parallel argument to the one in this chapter: rather than viewing medieval Muslim cities as totally distinct and separate from the surrounding countryside, he says we must view the cities “not as isolated artifacts, but in terms of their relationships to the larger social, geographic, and religious environments in which they are embedded.”¹³² He states further, “the belief in the unity of city societies, and the conviction that city and country are radically opposed, are exaggerated and misleading.”¹³³ Situating the urban within the rural, and vice versa, can lead to some fascinating discoveries that might not have been possible had one stuck with the notion that the urban is entirely different from the rural.

One major consequence that arises when Sufism is distinctly set apart from the Ottoman Tradition is that the Sufi orders tend to be connected historically *largely* with revolts against Traditional power bases. This is because, based upon the dichotomies above, the orders are viewed as being in constant tension with the ‘center,’ and thus inherently anti-traditional. The Sufi orders, in many historical accounts, come to be defined only as a nuisance that must be controlled by the orthodox leadership. This attitude is no different in many historical accounts of the Ottoman Empire, as we shall see

¹³⁰ Gellner, 309

¹³¹ Ira Lapidus, “Muslim Cities and Islamic Societies,” 47.

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ *Ibid.*

later. Further, in the Ottoman Empire, popular (or mystical) Islam tends to be separated out from the mainstream history of the Empire. This example shows the danger in adhering to a strict dichotomy of Sufi/orthodox, center/edge, etc.

Thus, while the dichotomies discussed above ('center/edge,' 'orthodox/Sufi,' 'courtly/popular,' 'urban/rural') are helpful in many ways, they can also serve to close doors of observation and analysis of Islam in the Ottoman Empire. The multitude of border crossings that take place at every level between these two dichotomies speaks of a breakdown in the very dichotomy itself. If anything, the initial dichotomy is helpful mostly in that it points towards its own weaknesses. Just as the medieval Muslim city appears at first glance distinctly walled off as a self-contained entity from the countryside, so too does Sufism in the Ottoman Empire, according to most histories, appear to be a separate tradition, only marginally and occasionally affecting the center. My argument is that the focus should be on the porous nature of the walled cities, allowing traffic, travel and relationship between the city and the countryside, rather than on the sharply delineated markers between urban and rural, Sufi and orthodoxy. Historical geography, I argue, cannot separate out Sufism from the larger Tradition of Islam in the Ottoman Empire, for it is embedded in this Tradition. I am interested in the *relationship* between the urban and rural, and, by extension, the Sufis and 'Traditional Islam.' As a consequence, the Sufi orders are no longer connected solely to rural, popular, heterodox Islam, and are no longer relegated solely to a revolution-happy, separate, mystical dimension to be pushed aside in historical accounts. Instead the Sufi orders become a vital part of the unfolding of Islamic history and civilization.

With all this in mind I thus take as my starting point Cemal Kafadar's words, when he argues

Perhaps investigation of the Sufi traditions in Ottoman history can now replicate the cohesive function once fulfilled by Sufism itself within Ottoman social life. Most significant, it may allow us to replace the two-tiered model of religious and cultural history that still reigns in Islamic studies – namely, the sharp distinction of cultural life into 'high' (or courtly) and 'popular' realms – with a finely textured depiction once we view Sufism as mainstream of the field rather than an acute appendage or comic relief to real history."¹³⁴

Sufism in the Ottoman Empire was inherent to the religious, political and social make-up of the Empire, providing a necessary function for what Islam meant to those in the Empire. Historical accounts of the Empire, then, must respect this function, and must struggle against the marginalization of Sufism in the Ottoman Empire. While this is not an easy task considering the current political climate surrounding Islam, it is vital in doing justice to the Ottoman Empire as a historical and political entity whose legacy continues to shape Middle Eastern politics even today.¹³⁵

In sum, while this chapter does not purport to uncover new sources, it aims to gently point the direction of Ottoman historiography away from its preference for telling only the story of the center. While there are political, temporal and source-material constraints that arise when one argues against a theory of the exclusivity of history-as-center, I nonetheless believe it to be a necessary and important task. Hidden from view by a lack of clear, observable evidence and by a complicated political culture (imperialism, Wahhabism, anti-Shiism, secularization, etc.), one can just faintly make out

¹³⁴ Cemal Kafadar, "The New Visibility of Sufism in Turkish Studies and Cultural Life," in *The Dervish Lodge: Architecture, Art and Sufism in Ottoman Turkey*, ed. Raymond Lifchez, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 308.

¹³⁵ For a series of excellent articles of the impact and legacy of the Ottoman Empire, see ed. L. Carl Brown, *Imperial Legacy: The Ottoman Imprint on the Balkans and the Middle East*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

the traces of a legacy that was foundational in the very origins, growth, impact, and survival of the Ottoman Empire. It is to these traces of Sufism that I now turn.

Sufism in the Ottoman Empire

As the sun rises over Edirne in 1506, the Bayezid II mosque, built only a few years prior (1484-1488), is already abuzz with activity. While the Imams of the mosque are making final preparations for the morning prayer, behind the scenes at the large mosque complex, hidden from the sight of those present that day and also from historical view, lies a large group of Sufis tending to some of the most important tasks of the mosque's operations. In the kitchen, Sufis can be found cooking the meal for the day, meals that will be shared at lunchtime by those in the mosques as well as with the poor and the hungry. Other Sufi nurses are taking care of the local sick community (both physically and mentally ill).¹³⁶ Further, a Mevlevi lodge, founded several decades earlier, is open and fully functioning across town. Several sultans, like Bayezid II himself, in fact, "took a close interest in the Mevlevis."¹³⁷ All the way across the Empire, wounded Janissaries, involved in a fierce battle with the threatening menace of the Safavids, are being tended to by Bektāşi Sufis. Therefore, on both the battlefields and in the peaceful confines of the mosque, 'it would be reasonable to suppose that the dervishes attended to physical as well as to spiritual wounds.'¹³⁸ On the other side of the Empire, in the Balkans, Sufis were helping to settle the recently conquered European lands, bringing together communities, showing an "exemplary tolerance, a true flexibility of doctrines,

¹³⁶ Godfrey Goodwin, "The Dervish Architecture of Anatolia," in *The Dervish Lodge: Architecture, Art and Sufism in Ottoman Turkey*, ed. Raymond Lifchez, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 65.

¹³⁷ Halil Inalcik, *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age 1300-1600*, 201.

and religious syncretism, in the Islamic *bektashi* movement that preached in favour of joint places of worship, a real mixture of rites, and in contacts between Muslim dervishes and hesychastic Eastern Orthodox monks.”¹³⁹ In central Anatolia, mothers are waking up their children with stories shaping the history and future of the Empire, explaining how the founder of the Empire, Osman, was given Divine inspiration through the Sufi Şeyh Edebali (12th/13th century) to begin the narration of a Grand Empire that now provides the family with the structure of their lives.

This view of Sufis in the Ottoman Empire represents an accurate snapshot of the vast influence that Sufis played in the Empire. The impact and importance of the Sufi orders in the Ottoman Empire cannot be overemphasized, from the compassion of caring for the mentally ill at the Bayezid II mosque, to the doctrinal influences of mysticism on Ottoman thinking and policy. While this picture is of a specific time period, these influences were certainly not limited to early 16th century Anatolia. In many ways, in fact, the term ‘influence,’ which presupposes something coming from the outside to affect the activity of the center, is in fact insufficient to describe the role that the Sufis played. Beyond influence, Sufis in the Ottoman Empire served a constructive function in the political, social, and religious realms of the Empire, helping to shape and re-shape these realms throughout the course of its history.

Sufis played a role in all levels of Ottoman society, from the Sultanate to the peasantry, from the mosque to the *tekke*, from the political to the social, and from the frontier to the capital. In relationship (and sometimes conflict) with other aspects of the

¹³⁸ Goodwin, 65.

Islamic Tradition (the legal schools, *ulama*, jurists, the Ottoman administration, etc.), Sufism helped to generate and maintain social structure, political power, safety in the countryside and on the frontiers, and public welfare. In addition, they helped in bringing new converts to Islam, in creating schools and educational programs for children, and, later on, in nationalistic struggles. In each of these instances, and in so many more, Sufism generated meaning and structure as the Empire expanded and contracted. While conquering lands in Europe and Persia throughout the 15th and 16th centuries, Sufis helped to settle the land, helping to fold the new faces of the Empire into the fluid structure known as the Ottoman Empire. As the Empire declined, with foreign forces taking these lands back, Sufis helped the Ottoman population to deal with their worldly struggles by turning inward. Interestingly, some Westerners understood the importance of Sufism as evidenced by the comprehensive book (which I mentioned earlier) that was written by the Englishman John P. Brown in 1868.¹⁴⁰ In this book, Brown takes great care to explain all aspects of the Dervishes, documenting their origins to their various branches down to the ‘costumes’ that they wore and the prayers that they spoke.

To locate the importance of Sufism in the Ottoman Empire, I will begin by looking at the inner influences/traces of Sufism on the Ottoman Empire and Ottoman Islam, concentrating first on the Sufi Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī and showing briefly how he formed the intellectual background of Ottoman Sunni thought. I will then turn to the role of education in the Ottoman Empire, and how it was influenced greatly by Sufi thought. I will continue this discussion by looking at the outward traces/‘influences’ and

¹³⁹ Razvan Theodorescu, *Co-operation Through Cultural Interaction: Lessons From the Past and an Agenda for the Future*, in :Higher Education in Europe, Vol. XXVI, No. 2, 2001, 211.

specific ways that Sufis played a role in the Empire. Third, I will look at the relationship of the Sufi orders to the sultans and to the *ulama*, looking at one specific historical figure ('Abd al- Wahhāb ibn Ahmad al- Sha'rānī (d. 1565/6 C.E.)) that helps to show the influence of the Sufis. Finally, I will look at the opposition to Sufism throughout the years, arguing that it is in various parties' opposition to Sufism throughout Ottoman history that one can best understand the important role (and real threat) that Sufis played in the Ottoman Empire.

Intellectual background: al-Ghazālī and Ottoman education

There were important Sufi intellectual influences that helped to shape the philosophy and educational system of the Ottoman Empire. Along these lines, one of the most influential thinkers of Islam before and during the Ottoman Empire was Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (1058-1111), whose thought had a major impact on the Ottoman Empire. Indeed, the philosophy of al-Ghazālī influenced the Ottoman Empire to such a degree that Halil Inalcik has said, "By the Ottoman period, al-Ghazālī's thought dominated Sunni Islam."¹⁴¹

Al-Ghazālī's conception of Islam uniquely blended the inner and outer aspects of Islam, creating a fusion between Islamic Law (*shari'a*) and Islamic mysticism (*ḥaqīqa*). As Ira Lapidus says, "al-Ghazālī was able to combine acceptance of the transcendence of

¹⁴⁰ John P. Brown, *The Darvishes or Oriental Spiritualism*, Frank Cass and Co., (London, 1968), originally published in 1868.

¹⁴¹ Inalcik, 175.

God with the authority of the Prophet and the historical tradition of the community, with the personal experience and authority of the Sufi master.”¹⁴² Al-Ghazālī argued for a synthesis of the gnostic and the pious realms of the human being in order to purify the human being. Thus, the outer forms of life (daily rituals, prayer, social behavior) were extremely important for the development of the soul, unlike certain mystical paths which argue for a complete renunciation from the world. For al-Ghazālī, “inward and outward deeds, acts and knowledge, the struggle for virtue and the vision of God, are aspects of a single progressive achievement in the course of which the believer becomes more wise, more just, and more obedient, until he achieves the totality of being that entails at once mystical vision and ordinary piety.”¹⁴³ Learning for al-Ghazālī was not only studying, categorizing and predicting the shape of the outward form, but also an intense development of the inner self.

From the quote at the beginning of Chapter One, al-Ghazālī himself said, “Just as everything is manifest to man’s sight by means of light, so everything is manifest to man’s insight by means of Allah...”¹⁴⁴ Al-Ghazālī shows his combination of the inner and the outer by pairing *sight* and *insight* together as two sides of the same coin. Human beings could and should have both. Further, it is interesting to note from this quote its compatibility with orthodox Islam, as it points to the importance of the ‘means of Allah’ (presumably first and foremost the Qur’an) as the location of insight. Thus, al-Ghazālī played a major role in bringing together the esoteric and the exoteric aspects of Islam.

¹⁴² Ira Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 197.

¹⁴³ Lifchez, 20.

¹⁴⁴ Gairdner, 66.

Indeed, it has been said that al-Ghazālī “reconciled both [Sufism and orthodoxy] by the argument that orthodoxy without the revivalist leaven of Sufism was an empty profession, and Sufism without orthodoxy dangerous subjectivism.”¹⁴⁵ This reconciliation of Islam’s inner and outer dimensions helped to increase awareness and acceptance of Islamic mysticism in the Ottoman Empire. Justin McCarthy has argued that without the thought of al-Ghazālī and his disciples, “the mysticism of the Turks might not have found a place in the orthodox community.”¹⁴⁶ Thus, al-Ghazālī’s ideas were extremely important and popular in the Ottoman Empire, as he laid the foundation for the complicated and integrated relationship that existed between Islamic orthodoxy and Islamic mysticism.

Further evidence for al-Ghazālī’s popularity and influence in the Ottoman Empire is found in the fact that his thought was fiercely defended by members of the Ottoman *ulama*. A good example of this is found in the distaste that most Ottomans felt for extremely conservative groups who argued, directly or indirectly, against the faith and practice of al-Ghazālī. For example, when, in the 17th century, the conservative Kadızadeli movement argued against certain classic Sufi traditions such as devotional music and dancing, the majority of Muslims in the Empire were unwilling to accept this. As Madeline Zilfi says, “Denigration of the likes of al-Ghazālī, the preeminent authority in Sunni Islam since the twelfth century, was especially odious to *mainstream*

¹⁴⁵ Hamilton A.R. Gibb, *Studies on the Civilization of Islam*, Stanford Shaw and William Polk, eds., (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), 28.

¹⁴⁶ McCarthy, *The Ottoman Turks: An Introductory History to 1923*, (London: Longman, 1997), 17-18.

sensibilities”¹⁴⁷ (*italics mine*). The use of the word mainstream here is vital, because it speaks to the notion that the vast majority of Sunni Muslims in the Ottoman Empire were profoundly shaped by the thoughts of the Sufi Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī. Sufism was not only a marginal community of wandering ascetics and mystics (although, to be fair, it was also this), but an invaluable part of the essence of Islam itself.

Al-Ghazālī’s influence was also felt deeply in the Ottoman educational system.

Education, of course, forms the backbone of any society, by training and indoctrinating the future leaders of the ‘state.’ Due to the respect given to al-Ghazālī by Ottoman leaders, the diplomas issued to the Ottoman *ulama* after graduating from the *madrasas* were inscribed with a lineage tracing back to al-Ghazālī.¹⁴⁸ Thus, in a sense, all Ottoman *ulama* had been connected to and influenced by the thought of the Sufi mystic al-Ghazālī upon graduation. The education system as a whole was, in fact, influenced indirectly by al-Ghazālī through Taşköprülüzâde Ahmed (1495-1561), who was an important figure in the early development of the Ottoman educational system and was strongly influenced by al-Ghazālī. As Halil Inalcik has argued, “Taşköprülüzâde’s concept of knowledge and his division of the sciences provides a starting point for a study of learning and *medrese* education in the Ottoman Empire.”¹⁴⁹ Taşköprülüzâde’s religious views “inclined to mysticism”¹⁵⁰ and his thought was clearly influenced directly by al-Ghazālī, for, in

¹⁴⁷ Zilfi, 191.

¹⁴⁸ Inalcik 175.

¹⁴⁹ Inalcik, 165.

¹⁵⁰ Inalcik, 166.

“following al-Ghazālī, he maintains that contemplation is a necessary complement to the spiritual sciences”¹⁵¹ and further that “the scholar who studies only the exoteric religious sciences is a poor man, excluded from the greater realities.”¹⁵² In understanding the background and thinking of the Ottoman *ulama*, it is extremely important to keep in mind that these scholars were not studying only the outward forms of religious knowledge from a book (which is the stress of most modern Western Universities), but were also studying and contemplating inner knowledge. This basic educational theory which combined a study of outward knowledge with a contemplation of one’s inner nature came from al-Ghazālī, who was best known for reconciling “the orthodox teachings of the *ṣeriat* with the mysticism of the Sufis.”¹⁵³

Beyond the influence upon the inner and outer dimensions of education in the Ottoman Empire, al-Ghazālī’s thought also had an impact on the specific curriculum that was taught in Ottoman schools. As Halil Inalcik has argued, while there were some ‘fanatical’ *ulama* regarding science as contrary to religion, “in general the *ulema* of the Ottoman *medreses* held al-Ghazālī’s view that hostility to logic and mathematics was futile since these contained the essential elements of all the sciences.”¹⁵⁴ Thus a clear picture begins to emerge in the Ottoman Empire of al-Ghazālī’s broad view of what it meant to be educated, encompassing a wide range of exploration of inner and outer knowledge, math, science, and philosophy, while also maintaining a basic framework of study around the Qur’an and the idea of studying God’s Creation. This last point is

¹⁵¹ Inalcik, 166.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ Inalcik, footnote, 166.

illustrated well in al-Ghazālī's influence on the Ottoman educational system in relation to philosophy, where, "again, following al-Ghazālī, the Ottoman *ulema* maintained that the study of philosophy was permissible only as a preparation for the study of scholastic theology."¹⁵⁵ Thus, as has been shown, al-Ghazālī's thought influenced the way most Ottoman *ulama* were trained, and this training always had an eye toward inner knowledge, and the connection between the outer forms and their inner essence.

Manifestations of Sufism in the Ottoman Empire

Beyond the philosophical and educational influences of Sufi thought on the Ottoman Empire, there were many other ways in which the Sufi orders impacted the Empire. A member of the Empire could not have lived a day without seeing the physical manifestations of Sufism and Sufi doctrine. In what proceeds, I will analyze these physical manifestations in order to show the 'sight' aspect of Sufism in the Ottoman Empire. These physical manifestations were many and varied, and they helped in no small measure in the creation, survival, and basic structure of the Ottoman Empire. I will begin by looking at the ways in which the Sufis had a major impact upon the origins and early years of expansion of the Empire, before moving on to look at some of the physical remnants that we have today of Sufism in the Ottoman Empire. I will then turn my attention toward aspects of Sufi influence that are more difficult to find and explain, being inherently hidden and subtle in form.

¹⁵⁴ Inalcik, 176.

¹⁵⁵ Inalcik, 176.

The integral role that Sufism played in the *origins* of the Ottoman Empire is enormous. First of all, the Ottomans inherited a deep respect for mysticism from the Seljuks, their predecessors in Anatolia. Technically speaking, while the Mongols were the rulers who directly preceded the Ottomans in Anatolia, their rule was extremely decentralized, and “they never developed an effective administrative machinery to rule Anatolia themselves.”¹⁵⁶ The Seljuks, on the other hand, established more of an administrative system in Anatolia, and one of their legacies was the fact that “the Rum Seljuks also favoured the mystical traditions of Islam.”¹⁵⁷ As such, “the coexistence of orthodoxy and mysticism was another tradition transferred to Anatolia from Great Seljuk practice. It religiously defined the Turks.”¹⁵⁸

Secondly, the very origin of the Empire itself, from the earliest accounts, had a mystical dimension.¹⁵⁹ As the story goes, Osman, the first leader of the Ottomans, had a dream that a moon rose from the chest of the Sufi Şeyh Edebali and entered into his own chest. After entering his chest, the moon fertilized the land around him, suggesting that Osman would conquer the surrounding lands and help them to prosper. In the story, the moon represents the şeyh’s daughter, who Osman eventually married. Because Edebali was “the most influential man on the frontier,”¹⁶⁰ this marriage was no doubt a political move on Osman’s part. But more than this outward, political meaning, the dream had a metaphorical significance, for it implied to Ottomans throughout their history that the creation of their Empire had been divinely ordained. The world of the early Ottomans

¹⁵⁶ McCarthy, 30-33.

¹⁵⁷ McCarthy, 27.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ There is great debate about the origins, and thus the make-up and legacy, of the Ottoman Empire. These issues will be discussed later on in this chapter.

(and many subsequent generations) was based upon the notion that legitimacy was gained not simply from military might, but also from divinely ordained power. The fact that this legitimacy was bestowed by a Sufi was not a problem for the Ottomans until the 19th and 20th centuries. Interestingly, as we shall see later, this creation story was de-emphasized (or even left out) from some of the major Western histories of the Empire.

Finally, in the first few centuries of the Empire's existence, the Sufi brotherhoods played an extremely important role in helping the Empire to survive and even grow in three key areas: religious tolerance and conversion of newly conquered people, military defense of the Empire, and in creating and sustaining the Ottoman social and economic structure. As Ahmet Yaşar Ocak says, “des soufis originaires d'un mouvement hétérodoxe dit *baba'i*, révolté contre le pouvoir seldjoukide, ont joué un rôle considérable dans la naissance du pouvoir ottoman.”¹⁶¹ In each of these areas orthodox and unorthodox Sufis helped to create Ottoman society and the Islamic Tradition.

Religious Tolerance

The Sufi orders created a tolerant atmosphere throughout Anatolia, and later in the Balkans, leading to the eventual conversion of many people to Islam. As V.L. Ménage has shown by analyzing data from Ottoman administrative registers, “In the middle of the eleventh century, the population of Asia Minor was predominantly Greek-speaking and Christian; in the early sixteenth century it was predominantly Turkish-

¹⁶⁰ Inalcik, 55.

¹⁶¹ Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, “Oppositions au soufisme dans l'empire ottoman aux quinzième et seizième siècles,” in *Islamic Mysticism Contested: Thirteen Centuries of Controversies and Polemics*, eds. Frederick de Jong and Bernd Radtke, (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 603-613. (Translation: “The original Sufis coming from

speaking and about 90 percent Muslim.”¹⁶² Ménage attributes one of the main factors in this mass conversion to, as she calls, “The Islam of the *babas* (the dervishes on the frontier)...”¹⁶³ In pointing out their vast influence in rural Anatolia and their importance to conversion, she says, “The dominant figure in the life of the Turkish nomads and of the settled peasantry (and the strongest influence in the conversion of rural Asia Minor) was not the orthodox *‘alim* but the Turkish ‘holy man’...”¹⁶⁴ This figure (or figures) first served to organize the newly conquered communities. After becoming settled, they established “hospices and mills, planted orchards, developed schools, stimulated agricultural cultivation, provided for the safety of travelers, and mediated disputes among tribes.”¹⁶⁵ Local peasants in many cases found themselves in better shape after the Ottomans conquered their lands, thanks in no small measure to the Sufis and *babas*. Once the local area was established under the direction of the *baba*, they worked on converting the local population. They did this not by forcing people to accept the beliefs of orthodox Islam, but rather by preaching “a version of Islam that commonly stressed the universal aspects of Islam and a close resemblance or even synthesis of Muslim and Christian beliefs.”¹⁶⁶ Thus, the newly conquered lands of the Ottomans were, in the early years, structured to some degree around Sufi organizations, practices, and conversion.

It is thus difficult to imagine Ottoman expansion and settlement without the Sufis.

One can hypothesize that the Empire itself might not have lasted more than a few centuries, doomed to a similar fate that befell the Great Seljuks before them, who failed

the heterodox movement named *baba’i*, revolting against the Seljuk powers, played a large role in the origins of Ottoman power.”)

¹⁶² Ménage, 52.

¹⁶³ Ménage, 59.

¹⁶⁴ Ménage, 59-60.

¹⁶⁵ Ira Lapidus, “Sufism and Ottoman Islamic Society,” 28.

to control “the nomads who were the basis of their power.”¹⁶⁷ The Sufis provided a key link in the expansion and settlement of the Ottoman in the 13th-16th centuries, for “while formal Islamic institutions had little need to accept Byzantine influence, heterodox mystic Islam always found room to absorb elements from other religions it encountered.”¹⁶⁸ Thus, one can see a flexibility inherent on the borderlands of early Ottoman Islam, a flexibility which allowed for disparate religious traditions and cultures to live and work together under the large umbrella of their shared religious values and beliefs. Not only did they provide answers to existential questions and flexibility to an unsettled and disrupted population (after years of fighting with the Seljuks, Rum Seljuks, and Mongols), but, perhaps more importantly, they quickly set out to provide the necessary leadership to improve the physical conditions of the local populations.

The Ottoman Military

The Sufi orders were also deeply connected with the military forces of the Empire. To begin with, the *ahis* were groups of young men that served to protect the urban areas of the Empire by providing “protection for the city populations when the governments could not.”¹⁶⁹ These *ahis* were a *futuwwa* group, who were “closely connected with Sufism”¹⁷⁰ and were represented by “blameless men of respectable profession.”¹⁷¹ The famous Arab historian Ibn Battuta, after visiting Anatolia in 1333, said of these *ahis*,

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ McCarthy, 13.

¹⁶⁸ Inalcik, 28.

¹⁶⁹ McCarthy, 39.

¹⁷⁰ Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, Chapel Hill, 1975, 245.

¹⁷¹ Schimmel, 246.

They exist in all the lands of the Turkmens of al-Rum (the Ottoman word for Anatolia), in every district, city and village. Nowhere in the world are there to be found any to compare with them in solicitude for strangers, and in ardour to serve food and satisfy wants, to restrain the hands of the tyrannous, and to kill the agents of police and those ruffians who join with them.¹⁷²

Therefore, Sufi related groups played a role in social services of the Empire such as feeding the hungry and fighting tyranny.

Further, one of the main orders of the Empire, the Bektāşis, was directly tied to the Janissaries.¹⁷³ The Janissaries were the slave army begun by Murat I in the 14th century that served as the standing army of the Ottoman Empire for most of its history. Their power and influence grew as time passed, to the point that they had to be abolished altogether by Sultan Mahmud II in 1826. The Janissary Corps were intimately related to the Bektāşis throughout their history, as members of the Corps were required to be Sufis of the Bektāşī order and had to take a vow of faithfulness upon entering the Corps to follow the Bektāşī way. Further, Bektāşī *babas* blessed the actions of the Janissaries and served as chaplains to the military. In a formal ritual, the head of the Bektāşis placed his cap on the Commander-in-Chief of the Janissaries.¹⁷⁴ The Bektāşis were well known to attract Christians throughout their history and this worked well with the fact that the Janissary Corps was made up of Christian boys who had been taken as slaves.¹⁷⁵ The Bektāşis were also involved in the trade guilds of the Ottoman Empire, and thus “gave the

¹⁷² H.A.R. Gibb (trans.), *The Travels of Ibn Battuta*, London, 1958, Vol I., 419, quoted in Inalcik, *The Ottoman Empire*, 150.

¹⁷³ For an in depth look at the Bektāşī Order, see, J.K. Birge, *The Bektashi Order of Dervishes*, (London: Luzac Oriental, 1994).

¹⁷⁴ Birge, 74.

¹⁷⁵ Godfrey Goodwin, *The Janissaries*, London, 1997, 148.

corps a ready-made corporation with which to affiliate...¹⁷⁶ Due to these factors, the very existence of the Bektāşis helped to increase the size of the Janissary Corps, as “one result of the union between the plebian Bektāşi order and the Janissaries was the acceptance of all and sundry who wished to join the corps.”¹⁷⁷ In this way, the Bektāşi order provided military authority and served as a network for the large trade guilds, which helped to stimulate the Ottoman economy.

Other Sufi orders also played a role in military aspects of the Ottoman Empire, including the Melameti, the Halveti and the Naqshbandī.¹⁷⁸ The Mevlevis, in particular, were influential, especially during the reign of Murat IV, where “many officers of the household belonged to rival orders as if there were some irresistible spiritual drive in Ottoman society.”¹⁷⁹ Again, we see in the Ottoman military not only a direct relationship between the inner (Bektāşis and other Sufi orders) and the outer (Janissaries and the sultan’s household), but one can also observe the important role that Sufis played as legitimators of military organization and action. The abolishment of the Bektāşis in 1826, as we shall see later, was an important event in Ottoman history and serves as a good example of the rigid lines being drawn between heterodoxy and orthodoxy in the 19th and 20th centuries.

¹⁷⁶ Goodwin, 148

¹⁷⁷ Goodwin, 150.

¹⁷⁸ See Goodwin, 152ff.

¹⁷⁹ Goodwin, 152.

Social and Economic Structure

Finally, Sufis also played a major role in the Ottoman economy and social structure, particularly in the early years.¹⁸⁰ Economically speaking, most craft guilds and merchants were directly linked to the brotherhoods. The many guilds and lodges in the Empire provided places of refuge for weary travelers and merchants, and offered a place to exchange news and information about the happenings of the Empire. Many times these lodges were attached to larger mosque complexes, thus portraying vividly the clear relationship between Sufis and orthodox *ulama*. Further, lodge complexes provided direct social services for the society around them, including having a separate building with a big kitchen “where food was prepared for pilgrims and the local poor.”¹⁸¹ In the later years of the Empire, many lodges provided fountains which provided free drinks to pedestrians. This enhancement of the public realm at the *tekke*'s expense was a good example of the charity practiced by Muslims.¹⁸² These lodges thus offered services to the public (especially the poor) and created the possibility of networks and relationships being established between merchants and travelers, and the possibility of urban/rural exchange in places where these things would not have been possible due to the inadequate transportation and information infrastructure of the time. As Reşat Kasaba has argued, “Their [Sufis] organizational contribution to urban manufacturing associations and guilds made these sects particularly important and powerful in various

¹⁸⁰ For an excellent summary of the role that Sufis played in Islamic society in general, see J. Spencer Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), Chapter VIII.

¹⁸¹ Raymond Lifchez, “The Lodges of Istanbul,” in *The Dervish Lodge: Architecture, Art and Sufism in Ottoman Turkey*, ed. Raymond Lifchez, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 114.

¹⁸² Lifchez, 104.

parts of the empire.”¹⁸³ In many ways, the Sufis and their established organizations provided the conditions that were necessary for the exchange of goods and information that is vital to a healthy economy.

The mystical brotherhoods also were important in the basic social structure of the Empire, especially in the rural areas where popular religion was prevalent. This popular religion performed important functions in these rural areas by assisting in the day-to-day functioning of the Empire, helping to “interpret dreams, induce rain, cure diseases, and ensure fertility.”¹⁸⁴ Thus, they provided legitimate and authoritative answers to the basic questions of human existence: weather and crop supply (and thus continued survival), dream interpretation, illness, death, and fertility, among others. Sufis brotherhoods also provided the means for social mobility among the masses. In many ways, the vast network of lodges in the Ottoman Empire provided a physical and spiritual place for people to meet, rest, pray, and make connections to the larger world. In such a fashion, “the son of a peasant, by attaching himself to a shaikh, could exchange the confines of village life for the vast spaces of the Islamic world, sure of finding everywhere friends and the means to live and train.”¹⁸⁵ Thus, Sufi orders provided not only temporary assistance to weary travelers, but also opened a space for the possibility for more permanent social mobility, allowing lower classes to move up in the ranks and affect changes on the local and regional level.

¹⁸³ Resat Kasaba, “Populism and Democracy in Turkey, 1946-1961,” in *Rules and Rights in the Middle East: Democracy, Law and Society*, eds. Ellis Goldberg, Resat Kasaba, and Joel Migdal, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1993), 46.

¹⁸⁴ McCarthy, 39.

¹⁸⁵ Trimingham, 237.

Sufi orders also provided social bonds, second only to the family structure.¹⁸⁶ The orders also provided a social safety net for the poor and the sick through their extensive network of hospitals, shelters and soup kitchens. Further, the main goal and purpose of the Sufi orders was to provide spiritual meaning and refuge for the Ottoman people. As Kasaba has recently stated, in the orders, people “found a meaning to their lives and, occasionally, also the means of resisting the pressures of the central government, even when it was supported by the officially sanctioned version of the religion.”¹⁸⁷ Thus it is important to remember that one of the prime ways in which Sufis influenced the Empire was through religious and moral guidance. Further, from this quote it is obvious that Sufi orders did participate in resistance movements, but only ‘occasionally,’ and thus this resistance did not define the orders.

Finally, the practice of saint veneration that was common among most Sufis in the Empire contributed to the creation of beautiful architecture and a spiritual geography and orientation of the people toward the world. One of the great beliefs in Sufism is in the existence of saints, or *walīs*, known as ‘friends of God.’ These *walīs* (*veli* in Ottoman) are seen as “governors of the universe” causing rain to fall from heaven and serving the purpose of being “closely connected with the mystery of initiation and progress on the spiritual path.”¹⁸⁸ Sufi saints were also associated with miracles.¹⁸⁹ Due to their central importance in the Sufi orders, worship of their tombs after they died became a major aspect of Sufi life throughout Islamic history. Saint veneration is an important aspect of the worldly nature of Sufism and an aspect that in many cases led to charges of

¹⁸⁶ Trimingham, 237-238.

¹⁸⁷ Kasaba, 46.

¹⁸⁸ Schimmel, 204.

heterodoxy by Ottoman officials and *ulama*. Nonetheless, the importance of saints in Sufism is large, affecting local ritual and devotional practices, and being seen as inheritors of the esoteric dimensions of Islam. As one scholar says,

Sainthood became a basic tenet of the orders and an important factor in their rites and attitudes. Underlying Sufi devotion and respect toward the saints is the belief that those persons manifest all the attributes of the godhead. They are also the heirs of the esoteric mysteries of Islam and possess the exemplary personae of the Prophet Muhammad, his Companions (*ashap*), and his household (*ehl-i beyt*); ‘Ali, Fatima, Hasan and Husayn in particular), who are in essence the true representatives of Islam.¹⁹⁰

The beautiful, physical manifestations of Sufi architecture in the Empire have come directly from the fertile ground of Sufism, for in a Sufi’s belief in “the power of saints to intercede with God on behalf of their followers and with belief in their power to bestow graces and favors,” the beautiful architecture of the *tekkes* was “vividly manifested.”¹⁹¹ Beyond these physical manifestations, saint veneration also led to a kind of spiritual geography and orientation in the world. Cities and villages were born and/or structured around the tombs of saints and pious men. One’s location in the world, therefore, was determined by one’s proximity to the center, which in many, many cases was the tomb of a Sufi saint. As Trimingham has put it, “each village, town-section or district, each urban craft-guild, each tribe or section, had its tomb-centre, which influenced not merely the lives of affiliated and initiated members, but all who belonged to that particular community or locality.”¹⁹² These tombs eventually created administrative and political districts, as “shrines were endowed with agricultural estates to provide funds for their

¹⁸⁹ Schimmel, 206ff.

¹⁹⁰ M. Baha Tanman, “Settings for the Veneration of Saints,” in *The Dervish Lodge: Architecture, Art and Sufism in Ottoman Turkey*, ed. Raymond Lifchez, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 130-131.

¹⁹¹ Tanman, 166-167.

¹⁹² Trimingham, 234.

upkeep and for charitable activity,”¹⁹³ similar to the *waqf* (religious endowment) system. Thus, Sufis provided a vital economic link between the local village and the centralized Ottoman administration. The organizations that grew from the money supplied by the Ottoman government in turn became “centers of local worship, teaching and healing, and politics” and helped in “mediat[ing] local disputes.”¹⁹⁴ Also, the importance of literature in the Ottoman Empire was due to Sufi poets such as Ahmad Yasawi and the famous Yunus Emre.¹⁹⁵

Unfortunately, it is far too easy to see Sufism in the Ottoman Empire, in all of its diverse forms, as simply a monastic, marginalized community espousing heterodox doctrines that conflicted with the *ulama* and the central authorities of the Empire. In such a view, Sufis can be (and are!) given only a minor role in Ottoman history, relegated to importance only when involved in anti-government movements or other disturbances in the Empire. Yet nothing could be further from the truth. What I have attempted to show briefly above is the diverse manifestations of Sufis in the early Ottoman Empire, especially in its outward appearances. Further, it can be seen that knowledge and history became legitimate in much of Ottoman history mostly through religious legitimization. In short, the Sufi brotherhoods played a major role in the very structuring of the lives of the Ottomans, from its origins to its end, from sultan to peasant, and everything in-between, and helped the Empire in economic, social, legal, religious, and political spheres. For most of its existence, many subjects of the Ottoman Empire ordered their lives around and bore witness to Sufism as a mode of legitimate reality. Thus, “in these several forms, Sufi holy men, Sufi brotherhoods, Sufi lineages, and Sufi shrines became

¹⁹³ Ira Lapidus, “Sufism and Ottoman Islamic Society,” 27.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

the basis of communal solidarity among Muslim peoples.”¹⁹⁶ In the early years of the Empire, the Sufis played the role of ‘legitimators’ of knowledge, power, and community, to the point that “the support of the mystical fraternities was thus very important to anyone claiming authority over the Turks.”¹⁹⁷ For all the Orientalist images of the violent Turks/Ottomans who battled fiercely against the Christians in the Crusades, the Hapsburgs from the 16th to the 18th centuries, and the Allies in World War I, it is interesting to note that, for much of Ottoman history, authority itself was not granted by military might, but was bestowed through the quiet, inward looking ideas of the Sufi orders in the Empire.

Sufis and Sultans

It is important to keep in mind that what we separate out and name as ‘Islamic mysticism’ today was intimately related to not only the origins of the Empire, but also to the very leaders of the Ottoman Empire: the sultans. The relationship between the Ottoman sultans and the Sufis was of vital importance to the history of the Empire. The relationship, of course, was not always a good one. In many instances there was an extremely strained relationship between the sultan and the various Sufi orders in the Empire. In other cases, the relationship was extremely strong, and in many instances sultans consulted Sufi authorities about their actions. What is important for the purposes of this discussion is not whether the relationship was good or bad at any one particular historical period, but rather the fact that throughout the entire history of the Empire, an important relationship existed between the two sides. Whether in agreement or

¹⁹⁵ For a further discussion of the influence of these poets, see Schimmel, 328ff.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁷ McCarthy, 39.

disagreement, the conversation and clash that arose from the tension between these two forces went into creating the shape of Islam in the Ottoman Empire.

Early in the Empire, the relationship between the sultans and the Sufis, especially the dervishes and the *babas* in the rural areas, was extremely important for the survival of the sultans. As has already been mentioned, legitimacy of rule was granted by Sufis for the government and the military of the Empire in the 13th-15th centuries. As McCarthy says, “The [early] Ottoman sultans and their followers were, according to tradition, members of the mystical fraternities with close ties to their networks among the Turks.”¹⁹⁸ Further, because of the influence that the Sufis had on the guilds, the military, and the people themselves, isolating the Sufis by any of the sultans was political suicide. The early sultans needed the support and friendship of the various Sufis for many reasons. McCarthy argues that the early sultans were politically savvy, and “men who deeply understood their society... If they understood the *gazis*, *ahis*, and mystical religious brotherhoods, it was because they were *gazis* and *ahis* and they practised mystical Islam.”¹⁹⁹

A good example of this on again, off again relationship between Sufis and sultans can be found in Halil Inalcik’s analysis of the *Vilâyetnâme-I Sultan Osman*, which was the history of the Sufi Osman Baba, written by one of his dervish disciples. Osman Baba considered himself to be the figure (*kutb - quṭb* in Arabic) or “‘the pole of the universe’ in his time, and so all things including the Sultan had to recognize and consult him in their

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁹ McCarthy, 39-40

acts.”²⁰⁰ Thus, on the one hand, the *Vilāyetnāme* relates the story of the relationship between Osman Baba and the Sultan of the time, Mehmed the Conquerer. Indeed, “it chronicles the career of the saint in close relation with that of Mehmed the Conquerer, and associates the saint’s most spectacular miracles with the sultan.”²⁰¹ Thus, in this instance, the sultan is seen as being extremely close to the Sufis.

On the other hand, a related chronicle details the tension existing in the late 15th century in Istanbul between Sufis and the sultans, describing in detail how a dervish (possibly one of Osman Baba’s disciples) attempted to assassinate Sultan Bayezid II in the summer of 1492.²⁰² Certain sultans were staunchly opposed to Sufis in the Empire, but others, like Murad “had strong personal ties to certain of the Sufi orders.”²⁰³ His mother was a great benefactress of the Halveti order, and he was ‘anointed’ sultan not by the traditional Şeyhülislam, but by a shaykh of the Celveti Sufi order. Murat IV was very interested in the Mevlevi Order, and he “richly endowed the order’s original *tekke* at Konya and the Mevlevis grew so powerful that they were influential in deposing his successor, the deranged Ibrahim I, and helping place Mehmet IV on the throne.”²⁰⁴

The tension and friendship that existed at one time or another throughout the history of the Ottoman Empire between the sultans and the Sufis is an important aspect of the role that Sufis played in the Ottoman Empire. While in the early years of the Empire sultans were generally allied with the Sufi orders, by the end of the Empire, in the 19th and 20th centuries, the relationship soured permanently. However, no matter the *nature*

²⁰⁰ Halil Inalcik, *The Middle East and The Balkans under the Ottoman Empire*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Turkish Studies, 1993), 21.

²⁰¹ Inalcik, *The Middle East and The Balkans under the Ottoman Empire*, 28.

²⁰² Inalcik, *The Middle East and The Balkans under the Ottoman Empire*, 32.

²⁰³ Zilfi, 139.

of the relationship, the very fact that the relationship existed showed the position that Sufis held among the people and with the Ottoman administration. Sultans considered Sufis orders in the Empire of such importance that they went to great lengths, based upon their needs, to either alienate or embrace the brotherhoods, their leaders, and especially their members.

Sufis and the *ulama*

Another important aspect that will be helpful in illuminating the position of Sufi orders in the Ottoman Empire is that of the relationship of the Sufis to the *ulama*. This is a complicated and fluid relationship throughout the history of the Ottoman Empire, and a comprehensive account here is not possible. However, a few examples of this relationship will suffice to show the complicated and inter-woven nature of the relationship of the Sufis to the *ulama*. First, I will look at the general picture of the *ulama* vis-à-vis the Sufis before discussing the specific case of the famous Sufi ‘Abd al-Wahhāb ibn Aḥmad al-Sha‘rānī.

As I have argued, a rigid boundary between Sufi orders and the *ulama* does not adequately describe Islam in the Ottoman Empire. Madeline Zilfi agrees with this premise in her book on the Ottoman *ulama*,²⁰⁵ in which she shows the ways in which the various factions within Islam went into creating the Islamic tradition through their debates and disagreements. In studying the Ottoman religious institution (*ilmiye*), she finds that “the fate of the *ilmiye* between the 16th and late eighteenth centuries... was

²⁰⁴ Goodwin, 152.

²⁰⁵ See footnote #8

uniquely shaped by ideological conflict within the body of Ottoman religious.”²⁰⁶ Thus, she sees that the Ottoman religious community, as a whole, was generated from the debates and discussions that existed between different Muslim factions. Zilfi offers an in-depth analysis of the Kadızedeli movement.²⁰⁷ For Zilfi, this movement arose in reaction to the increasing influence of the Sufis, and was formed “to confront the challenge that the Sufis posed to the regular mosque preacher career over the century.”²⁰⁸ Interestingly, the founder of the movement, Kadızedeli Mehmed (d. 1582 C.E.), belonged originally to a Sufi order, much like Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb (d. 1792 C.E.) of the next century.²⁰⁹ In point of fact, many Sufis were appointed to positions as preachers of mosques in the Ottoman Empire in the 17th century. Twenty-three of forty-eight appointments of preachers between the years 1621 and 1685 were Sufis of the Halveti and Celveti orders, and “Sufis shaykhs were favorite choices for the five most prestigious mosques in the city.”²¹⁰ Clearly the influence of Sufis and Sufi beliefs can be seen when one considers the prevalence with which Muslims in the Empire heard Sufi preachers.

While one might assume the Kadızedeli movement to be against only heterodox Sufi orders, in fact it also turned against the *ulama* hierarchy, accusing them of being too interested in Sufism.²¹¹ Zilfi argues that the Kadızedelis thus remained a religious

²⁰⁶ Zilfi, 14.

²⁰⁷ This was a 17th century movement that lost popularity after the Ottoman defeat in Vienna (1683).

²⁰⁸ Zilfi, 163.

²⁰⁹ An interesting study, outside the scope of this work, would be to trace the origins of the major leaders of the anti-Sufi movement, like the two mentioned. Perhaps a hypothesis based upon the reactionary nature of these movements, rather than a proactive stance, could be argued from these origins.

²¹⁰ Zilfi, 165.

²¹¹ Zilfi, 171.

minority, being too narrow in their views.²¹² As such, the Ottoman administration sought to limit the power of the Kadızadelis, as “virtually every Kadızadeli burst was followed by an official recoil.”²¹³ The Kadızadelis simply did not understand the basic notion of religious tolerance that existed in the Empire, wherein there was “an underlying assumption of the legitimacy not only of religious difference – as between Muslim and non-Muslim – but also of cultic difference, acceptable variance within the main body of Sunni Islam.”²¹⁴ The Kadızadelis provide a good example of the complicated nature of the relationship between the Sufis and the *ulama*. Most importantly, they provide a key to understanding the ways in which Sufi thought and practice played a vital role in creating Islam as it existed in both the official and personal levels of the Empire. As Michael Winter says, “*Ulama* were especially susceptible to Sufism,”²¹⁵ with the number of *ulama* leaving their positions at the apex of their career to become Sufis being very large indeed. Further, many *ulama* in the late Middle Ages, he argues, were writing commentaries and teaching about Sufi works.²¹⁶ While sometimes in conflict over doctrine and belief, in general there was an acceptance of Sufi beliefs, such that Sufis were appointed to preachers of mosques, many *ulama* were members of Sufi orders, and many Sufis attended formal *madrasas*, learning the basic tenets of the Islamic orthodoxy. Sufis and *ulama* were anything but separate and distinct in their make-up, and their effects on each other were vast.

²¹² Zilfi, 191.

²¹³ Zilfi, 195.

²¹⁴ Zilfi, 192.

²¹⁵ Winter, 30.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*

The case of the Egyptian Sufi ‘Abd al-Wahhāb ibn Aḥmad al-Sha‘rānī (d.1565 C.E.) is extremely helpful in further clarifying the relationship between the Sufis and the *ulama*. Sha‘rānī lived in the time when the great Mamluk Sultanate was overrun by the Ottoman Empire (923A.H./1517C.E.). He also lived during a time when “Sufism had attained a dominant position in Islamic culture and society.”²¹⁷ Sha‘rānī completed a traditional *madrassa* education with over fifty teachers leading him through subjects like *fiqh*, *hadith*, *sira*, Qur’an *tafsir*, and Sufism. Perhaps his most famous teacher, Zayn al-Din Zakariyya al-Ansari, was the Shafi’i Chief *qadi*. Interestingly, Zakariyya was also a Sufi,²¹⁸ and he first initiated Sha‘rānī as a Sufi novice. Sha‘rānī went on to become a famous writer and teacher in the Empire, and he was always extremely loyal to Sultan Suleyman the Magnificent. Sha‘rānī was both a Sufi and a member of the *ulama*, which was not uncommon at the time. In some instances, he criticized the *ulama*. For example, he believed the *fuqahā’* to be unnecessarily argumentative and wordy, and that “in every generation the Sufis were more knowledgeable than the *ulama*.”²¹⁹ Yet while he criticized the *ulama* at times, his main concern was not with “closing the breach between *Shari’a* [law as conceived by the *ulama*] and *Haqiqa* [Truth of Reality as conceived by the mystics]... instead, he addresses his writings to both Sufis and *ulama*.”²²⁰ In fact, he makes an argument similar to my idea that the borders between Sufi and *ulama* were extremely flexible in the Ottoman Empire, saying that “there was no quarrel or

²¹⁷ Winter, 28.

²¹⁸ Winter, 54.

²¹⁹ Winter, 234.

²²⁰ Winter, 236.

contradiction between a perfect Sufi and a perfect *faqih*.”²²¹ Sha‘rānī represents well a figure living in the space between Sufism and the *ulama* and frequently crossing the borders between the two. Of course, despite the interconnected relationship between Sufis and other aspects of the Ottoman Empire, there were nonetheless many opposition movements (one of which – the Kadızadelis- has already been discussed) against the Sufis.

Opposition to the Sufis

Looking at the movements against the Sufis in Ottoman history is important for two reasons. First, it is important not to paint an entirely rosy picture of the relationship of the Sufis to the Empire and its orthodoxy. In fact, there was much rancor over the various Sufi orders at many levels of society. Secondly, a look at the opposition movements in the Empire shows that the Sufi orders were important enough to be seen as a true threat to the Empire and to the orthodoxy of Islam, and thus to be opposed. Much can be learned about the reactionary movements of the Ottoman Empire (the Wahhabis in Arabia, the Kadızadeli, and even the Kemalist Republicans) from a look at how Sufism was opposed in the Empire. A great deal has already been discussed in relation to the sources of opposition to the Sufi orders, including the sultans (at times), the *ulama*, and different fundamentalist movements. Thus, opposition came from all angles, which leads some scholars to assume an inherent substance in the religion of Islam that is anti-Sufi. This is a mistaken conclusion, especially based upon the facts laid out so far in this chapter. Nonetheless, there was significant opposition to Sufi orders throughout the

²²¹ *Ibid.*

Ottoman Empire because, as Ernest Gellner argues, since the *ulama* (those who were anti-Sufi) were the ‘arbiters of legitimacy’ in the Ottoman Empire, they tended to create a monolithic entity out of alternatives (like Sufism) and then bury those alternatives by claiming them to be illegitimate.²²²

Official opposition to Sufis gained momentum in the early 19th century, not coincidentally just at the time when the Western world was making serious inroads into the Empire. In July of 1826, for example, just after the Janissary Corps was abolished, the Şeyhülislâm convened a group of *ulama* and the leaders of the main Sufi orders to formally abolish the Bektâşi order. The basic charge against the order was not in its founder or its original beliefs, but “those elements which had subsequently infiltrated the order and destroyed its orthodox character.”²²³ Thus, the age-old issue of heterodoxy was brought up again to completely dismantle the Bektâşi order. Interestingly, other Sufi orders were part of the meeting that officially abolished the Bektâşis: this shows both the important role that some Sufi orders played in state decisions even in the 19th century, and also the fact that certain Sufi groups were opposed to other Sufi groups. The opposition to Sufism grew throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries, leading to the total abolishment of all Sufi orders by Mustafa Kemal in 1926.

A common conception of Islam in the Ottoman Empire (and, for that matter, anywhere) is that it speaks to all aspects of the human being’s outward life, from the political to the legal to the social; and hence it is a complete religion. While this

²²² Gellner, 307-326.

²²³ John Barnes, *An Introduction to Religious Foundations in the Ottoman Empire*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1986), 87.

statement may be true, it only portrays part of the picture, as I have shown. From this view, only Islam's outer forms (its politics, social rules, treatment of women, legal foundations, etc.) are considered. Yet an entire half of Traditional Islam is left off, the half that speaks of piety, of individual goodness and ethical behavior, of contemplation of the soul, and of morality. These aspects of Islam were fully integrated into the very fabric of what it meant to be a Muslim: they were taught in schools of higher learning, they influenced the very structure of Ottoman society, and they affected the Ottoman economy, the Ottoman government and the Ottoman *ulama*. The reach and popularity of the Sufi orders in the Empire were such that they had to be strongly challenged throughout the history of the Empire. In short, Sufi orders and Sufi interpretations stressing the importance of the inner life was a reality to all Ottomans (even though not all Ottomans embraced Sufism), a reality that was not separated out from the mainstream but helped to form mainstream, Traditional Islam in all of its manifestations. Separating the Sufi orders from the larger religious landscape of Ottoman Empire is a helpful tool for further understanding Sufi thought and practice. But, it is also extremely helpful to view the many ways in which Sufism was integrated into, and helped to form, the larger Islamic tradition. Sufi orders and Sufi thought was seen in the streets, on the battlefields, in the countryside, in the *madrasas*, in the Sultan's palace, and in the trade guilds, and thus formed a major aspect of the historical narrative of the Ottoman Empire. Its interactions, conversations, and debates with the people and Islamic orthodoxy form the basis of communal structure and the Islamic tradition in the Ottoman Empire. Unfortunately, however, far too often this integral relationship between Sufism and

orthodox Islam has been forgotten in modern scholarship. It is to this topic that I shall now turn.

Historical Erasure

The very act of separating out and categorizing Sufism and Sufi orders in the Ottoman Empire as something entirely different from mainstream Islam has been a deliberate move made by modernists who have been interested mostly in having authority over the Turkish people. These modernists that I speak of were born in 18th and 19th century Ottoman encounters with the West and with Western ways of understanding and producing knowledge itself. This discourse, in turn, found its apex in the figure of Mustafa Kemal and his disciples, who understood well the quote from above, that “the support of the mystical fraternities was thus very important to anyone claiming authority over the Turks.”²²⁴ However, instead of finding the support of these groups, Kemal and others decided to attempt to control and destroy these Sufi orders. My argument is that, in the 20th century, the extreme methods of Kemal and the modernists of the young Turkish nation to outlaw and marginalize the Sufi orders in the Ottoman Empire is a direct result of the vital importance that they played in the Empire. In other words, the modernists of the Kemal regime were well aware that to control the Turkish people, whose support they needed in creating a new regime, they had to pay a great deal of attention to the Sufi orders. And it was thus that the marginalization of the esoteric aspects of Islam, and the voice that these Sufi orders gave to the people, began what would become a common theme in 20th century Western encounters with the Islamic world.

Finally, the marginalization of the Sufi orders in the Ottoman Empire was continued by Ottoman historians, who have generated historical narratives in which the Sufi orders have been seen as only side players in the larger Ottoman Empire. The main importance of the Sufi orders in the Ottoman Empire, according to many historical accounts, has been related to revolts and anti-government activity. A good example of this is the strong interest in the historical figure of Şeyh Bedreddin (d. 1420 C.E.), and the role of the Bektāşis in the struggle for nationalism.²²⁵ While this is important work, it is striking that the role of the Sufi orders in the Ottoman Empire has been reduced to revolutionary movements, and that Sufis themselves have come to be seen mostly as figures of destabilization in the Empire.

Of course, I do not mean to suggest that the move away from Sufism in the Ottoman Empire came *only* from outside of Islam. As I have stated, there were many forces throughout the Empire that fought against the influence and doctrine of the Sufis. The aforementioned anti-Sufi doctrines of the Kadızadeli and the Wahhabi movements serve as examples of this fight. Further, conservative legalists in the Empire were also very much against Sufism in the Empire. Their basic belief was that Sufis were so far away from the Islamic tradition in Muhammad's time that they were polytheists. Thus they were to be fought against at all times. The combining of Sufis with Shi'is, as already mentioned, also fed the fire of anti-Sufism for many Sunnis. In my view, however, the Sufi orders were too popular and too integral to Islam to be marginalized by only internal

²²⁴ McCarthy, 39.

²²⁵ An excellent resource for this is Hülya Küçük, *The Role of the Bektāşis in Turkey's National Struggle*, (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

factors. The marginalization of the Sufi orders required an outside influence, a discourse that would undermine the very roots of these orders, and this outside influence is found in the discourse of modernism.

I will begin with my first point, that the discourse of modernism (as discussed in Chapter One), which eventually led to the complete marginalization of the Sufi orders in the Ottoman Empire, arose in Ottoman encounters with the West in the 18th and 19th centuries. As the West began its military and intellectual march into Ottoman lands throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, an interesting discourse of ‘civilization’ began emerging from Western scholars. This discourse of ‘civilization’ was to slowly make its way into the thoughts of many Ottoman scholarship themselves, leading to the total disruption of the Ottoman ideal with Mustafa Kemal. This discourse was based upon the division of knowledge into what Jean François Lyotard calls narrative and scientific knowledge. He argues that narrative knowledge is most prevalent “in the formulation of traditional knowledge”²²⁶ and that scientific knowledge

questions the validity of narrative statements and concludes that they are never subject to argumentation or proof. He [the scientist] classifies them as belonging to a different mentality: savage, primitive, underdeveloped, backward, alienated, composed of opinions, customs, authority, prejudice, ignorance, ideology... at best, attempts are made to throw some rays of light into this obscurantism, to civilize, educate, develop.²²⁷

Thus, Western imperialism, interested in scientific knowledge since the Enlightenment, invaded both the Ottoman lands and the Ottoman language. In so doing, the Ottoman/Turkish construction of reality was changed, and the new Turkish discourse was centered around creating a new society based on this need to ‘civilize.’

²²⁶ Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 19.

²²⁷ Lyotard, 27.

While Anatolia was never truly politically colonized, I argue it certainly was nationalistically and philosophically (i.e. atheistically) colonized. Due to the nature of this ‘scientific’ knowledge, the Ottoman discourse was forced into debate and discord around the notion of the ‘uncivilized.’ In so doing, all that was related to the Sufi orders came to be seen as uncivilized. Zia Gökalp, a leading thinker of the Kemalist era (who was later banned by Kemal when his ideas were seen as too pro-Sufi), illustrates this point nicely in his book *The Principles of Turkism*.²²⁸ This book was written when the fall of the Ottoman Empire was a foregone conclusion, and Turkish thinkers were looking for how to carve out a future from the ruins of their current situation, seeking to find what aspects of the Ottoman Empire they should hold onto, and what aspects they should discard. What is most fascinating about this book is that his entire epistemology is based on Western scholarship. Throughout the book, he uses as his sources of legitimacy Western scholars, from Emile Durkheim to William James to Henri Louis Bergson. Further, what he wants to hold onto most dearly is the peasant/folk culture of the Ottomans, a category created in large part to divide the Empire and marginalize the Sufis. His entire language and vocabulary of progress and civilization is created by these Western thinkers. Gökalp does not look to the Qur’an, the hadith, Ottoman scholarship from the past, or current Turkish scholars, but to Western thinkers as his sources of truth and knowledge. In Gökalp we see the colonization of Turkey, though not manifest in political terms, as being completed: the power of the West was so much that it created a new vocabulary, a new language, and thus a new reality, for the leaders of Turkey.

²²⁸ Zia Gökalp, *The Principles of Turkism*, Robert Devereux (trans.), (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1968).

This discourse of the ‘civilized’ is carried to its extreme conclusion with the figure of Mustafa Kemal. Kemal realized that the only way to avoid losing everything at the end of World War I was to re-imagine Turkish history in a violent and extreme fashion. In many ways, he may have been right, for if he hadn’t done this, historical lessons teach us that the Western powers would have colonized his country otherwise. In any case, they let him do their work for them. This extreme re-imagining of what it meant to be a Turk manifested itself in the changing of the alphabet, the changing and modernizing of Turkish dress, and finally, the shutting down *all* Sufi orders in 1926. His logic for this move comes directly from this discourse of the ‘civilized.’ He says, “I cannot accept that in our civilized society people continue to be so primitive that they seek material and spiritual happiness through the guidance of some sheikh or other, when they are not face to face with the sunburst of today’s knowledge, today’s science, and the whole scope of modern civilization.”²²⁹ Kemal inherited a discourse of the battle between the civilized and the primitive that had been years in the making. He simply took it to its logical conclusion. And it was thus that the Sufis were erased from the reality of Turkish life. The goal of Mustafa Kemal to ‘civilize’ the Turkish people was based on Western notions of civilization and progress. One fatal casualty of this process was Sufism and Sufi orders in the Empire. Of course, due to their importance to the Turkish people, the orders did not by any means disappear. They simply went underground. As one scholar put it in a lecture in 1968, “Turkish nationalism and Western civilization, the two main pillars of Ataturk’s cultural orientation, have proved incapable of filling, even for many educated Turks, the spiritual vacuum created by the

²²⁹ Quoted in Frederick Latimer, *The Political Philosophy of Mustapha Kemal Ataturk*, Dissertation presented to the Faculty of Princeton University, 1960, 138.

elimination of Islam.”²³⁰ The current surge in popularity of Islamic-oriented parties in Turkey (many of which are strongly influenced by Sufism) shows that this legacy continues to exist.²³¹

Ottoman historians continued this marginalization of the Sufi orders and wrote it into the narrative of Ottoman history, not just 19th and 20th century history, but into all of Ottoman history. Many of the challenging issues already discussed surrounding the marginalization of the Sufis in the Ottoman Empire arise in two major histories of the Ottoman Empire, Halil Inalcik’s *The Ottoman Empire* and Stanford Shaw’s *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*. Inalcik, one of the most influential contemporary scholars of the Ottoman Empire, begins his two-part history with the classic, yet problematic, distinction between ‘high’ Islam and ‘popular’ Islam. As he says in speaking of the early Ottoman lands, “The advanced civilization of the hinterland, with its religious orthodoxy, scholastic theology, palace literature composed in an artificial literary language, and *şeriat* law, gave way in the frontier lands to a popular culture, characterised by heretical religious orders, mysticism, epic literature and customary law.”²³² Immediately, he draws a sharp distinction between high Islam and popular Islam. While I do believe this distinction to be very useful in many instances, I am arguing that these categories cannot be so distinct from one another. There was a fluidity to Ottoman culture, across borders of urban and rural areas, orthodox and Sufi, the inner and outer.

²³⁰ Uriel Heyd, *Revival of Islam in Modern Turkey*, (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1968), 25.

²³¹ For an excellent recent article on this issue, see David Remnick, “The Experiment: Will Turkey be the model for Islamic democracy?” in *The New Yorker*, (Nov. 18, 2002), 50-55.

²³² Inalcik, *The Ottoman Empire*, 6-7.

In beginning with this rigid distinction, Inalcik has set himself up to analyze the Ottoman Empire from the center, separating out the rural/frontier/mystical as a distinct entity, not to be ignored, but also not to be integrated. In later discussing the early conquests of Osman, Inalcik does, in fact, mention the creation story of Edebali, but his analysis of the story is that since the mystics dominated the frontiers (again, no mention is made of mysticism anywhere other than the rural areas), Osman, being political by nature, realized he needed to ally with the mystics. Thus, he “had the foresight to marry the daughter of Edebali, the most influential man on the frontier.”²³³ Inalcik makes no mention of the importance of the divine legitimacy that Edebali, as a Sufi shaykh, gave to the creation of the Ottoman Empire.

Inalcik also falls into the trap of equating mystics in the Empire with revolutionary movements. As he says, “The sultans always feared religious leaders, especially the popular *şeyhs* and dervishes whom they sought to make dependent on their own goodwill or to subdue with stern measures. These *şeyhs* and dervishes were usually the principle propagandists of opposition movements.”²³⁴ He goes on to list examples of when sultans executed various *şeyhs* for their roles in anti-governmental activity. Even when sultans are seen as accepting of the Sufi orders, like Murad II, he explains this away, saying “his support for this new *tarikāt* was partly a deliberate attempt to spread his own influence among the people.”²³⁵ Inalcik reduces all relations between the government and the Sufi orders to politics. Reading Inalcik, one gets the sense that the Sufi orders were important

²³³ Inalcik, *The Ottoman Empire*, 55.

²³⁴ Inalcik, *The Ottoman Empire*, 99.

²³⁵ Inalcik, *The Ottoman Empire*, 192.

in the Ottoman Empire mostly as political tools. He thus ignores the many positive relationships, described above, that existed between Sufis and sultans.

While alluding to several different areas of Sufi influence in his work (much of which I have used above, such as the influence of al-Ghazālī and Ibn ‘Arabi, the influence of Sufism in education, etc.), Inalcik nonetheless leaves an analysis of Sufism and mysticism to a separate and distinct chapter entitled “Popular Culture and the Tarikats – Mystic Orders.” He again repeats his high vs. popular religious distinction here, and the bulk of the chapter is taken up in discussing Sufis in relation to anti-government uprisings. As he says, “It is hardly surprising that popular uprisings in Anatolia, whose fundamental causes were social and political, nearly always took the form of heretical religious movements.”²³⁶ He attributes the very origin of many Sufi orders (the Bayrami and Hurufi, in particular) to the ‘unrest’ in Anatolia in the early 15th century. He goes on to analyze the case of Şeyh Bedreddin, who led a popular movement in the 15th century.²³⁷ In sum, Inalcik begins with the premise of a clear distinction between high and popular religion, allowing very little relationship between the two. As such, his analysis proceeds along these two eternally parallel tracks. While he does make mention of the influence and existence of the Sufis in the Ottoman Empire, it is either as a marginalized category or as an anti-government medium. Never is there interaction between these two tracks, and the complex relationship between the two is never explored.

Stanford Shaw’s historical account of the Ottoman Empire is even less interested in Sufi influence. He again mentions the Sufis only in certain specific circumstances,

²³⁶ Inalcik, *The Ottoman Empire* 187.

²³⁷ Inalcik, *The Ottoman Empire*, 188ff.

among them: as political pawns of the sultan, as leaders of dissent among the people, as contributing to the literary output of the Ottomans, and as marginalized groups in the rural lands. In the first instance, Shaw barely mentions the mystic orders in relation to the origins of the Empire, including them only to mention that Orhan supported the orders financially, not for any other reason than that these orders “encouraged the nomads to accept Ottoman leadership.”²³⁸ Thus, Sufis dervishes were seen as political constituents only. Amazingly, the important story of Edebali is completely left out of Shaw’s account. Later in the Empire, Shaw brings up the Sufi orders in relation to revolt against the government with Şeyh Bedreddin,²³⁹ war with Venice in the 15th century,²⁴⁰ and fighting the Safavids in the early 16th century.²⁴¹ He says, “Heterodox religious movements that had been dominant among the Turkomans in eastern Anatolia and served as outlets for political dissent began to spread into the cities and among the Janissaries.”²⁴² The image Shaw portrays here is of a sneaky heterodoxy that was slowly creeping into Ottoman urban society and disrupting the current order.

The equation of the Safavids, who were Twelver Shi’ites, with the Sufis is interesting in that it shows the tendency, within Islam, to make this very connection. The Shi’a, of course, were in many instances enemies of the Sunnis and posed a serious political, military, and ideological threat to the Ottoman Empire. Shaw also discusses the Sufis in terms of their legendary figures, including Rumi and Yunus Emre, but he doesn’t analyze their impact on Ottoman society beyond than their literary output. Finally, Shaw leaves only two full pages (where Inalcik had at least devoted a chapter) to “The Popular

²³⁸ Shaw, 15.

²³⁹ Shaw, 40.

²⁴⁰ Shaw, 75.

Religious Organizations.”²⁴³ He concludes this section with the brief sentence, “The religious orders permeated Anatolian society in Ottoman times and provided refuge, protection, and religious fulfillment for the individual as well as means to express his interest and views in a society that otherwise was organized mainly to benefit the members of the Ruling Class.”²⁴⁴ How ironic it is for Shaw to make such a sweeping (and relatively accurate) statement about the influence of the Sufis and yet provide no evidence or analysis of this in a massive, three volume work on the Ottoman Empire.

Thus, it is very clear that both Inalcik and Shaw have marginalized and de-emphasized Sufism in the Empire. This marginalization, of course, was not simply a haphazard occurrence, but rather a conscious and unconscious choice made by these authors (and many others) based on several centuries of cultural and intellectual history. The end result of Sufis being marginalized in Ottoman history is ultimately connected to the power and knowledge of the West, Western and Islamic discourse, and the steady march of modernization and Western civilization into Ottoman lands over the course of the 19th and 20th centuries.

Conclusion

There are many dangers of ignoring the legacy and importance of the Sufi orders – which is an important manifestation of esoteric Islam - on the Ottoman Empire. In the political realm, the ignoring of Sufism and other devotional traditions within Islam leads many in the West to underestimate the depth of feeling that many Muslims have for their

²⁴¹ Shaw, 77-78.

²⁴² Shaw, 75.

²⁴³ Shaw, 153-155.

²⁴⁴ Shaw, 155.

religion as a solution to the world's problems, both inner and outer. Part of the reason the Iranian Revolution was so shocking to Westerners was exactly because Islam, particularly its deeply-felt, inner dimensions, were completely ignored. Yet beyond this, it is damaging to both a just portrayal of Ottoman history and to the tradition of Islam itself. Many new scholars have seen this problem and are beginning to work on it.²⁴⁵ Cemal Kafadar, in particular, has explored these issues in his book *Between Two Worlds*.²⁴⁶ In this book, he has traced the history of scholarship on the origins of the Ottoman Empire. Ultimately, he concludes that it is better to view the Ottomans and their history as having multiple identities, rather than fixed, static ones. He says the historical model that is most appropriate for looking at the Ottoman Empire is not the 'onion' approach, in which one peels off many layers in order to find the center. Rather, he argues in favor of the 'garlic' approach, which allows for a plurality of voices and is non-linear in nature. I very much agree with this conclusion, and it is what I have tried to do in this chapter. I argue that the borders between identities, particularly the identities of 'Sufi' and 'orthodox,' were porous in nature. Most Ottomans, whether *ulama* or peasant, were aware of and deeply affected by the teachings, the spirituality, and the physical manifestations of Sufism in the Ottoman Empire. To write this out of history, as so many have done, especially since the time of Mustafa Kemal, is to ignore a vital part of what went into creating the Ottoman Empire and its religious tradition.

Far too often historical scholarship in the Ottoman Empire has been too closely aligned with the politically powerful. This is the easy path, because it is what the government of the powerful funds and what the inertia of the field has created.

²⁴⁵ Among these are Reşat Kasaba, Cemal Kafadar, Suraiya Faroqhi, and Fatma Goçek.

Unfortunately, the forgotten notion that history could have happened another way is squashed by the powers of those who argue for the inevitability of history. As the argument goes, it was inevitable, in the case of the Ottomans that they would decline, because the West was and is clearly superior. This view from the center ignores the idea of the fluidity of the moment and of history in general, opting instead for finding solid reasons for why those in power are in power, and why those who aren't in power still aren't in power (and, by implication, must stay that way). Uncovering the importance of the Sufi orders on the Ottoman Empire is one way to expose the ways in which Ottoman history has been written almost entirely from the center. The underlying point in looking at Sufi orders in the Ottoman Empire is that there is a deep connection between historical writing and political power.

Further, because history is written based upon empirical evidence, in many instances this empirical evidence, these traces of history, exist only from the elite class. Outward forms of historical traces are always directly related to those in power, for it is those in power who want to perpetuate their power by, in a sense, 'defeating time,' leaving traces of themselves that last beyond one generation (thus a move from oral to written history, and a move toward architecture and material objects built to withstand the wearing of time). In the Ottoman Empire, this meant that "The tekkes of Istanbul rarely exhibited the permanent and conspicuous styles of the architecture of mosques and *madrasas*."²⁴⁷ Sufis were generally less interested in creating lasting legacies of their power, and more interested in addressing the basic questions of their time. Those not in

²⁴⁶ Cemal Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

²⁴⁷ Lifchez, 126.

power, hidden from historical view, remain hidden in history, because they were not generally interested in creating physical legacies to last beyond a few generations.

Modest in dress, speech and abode, Sufis generally fall under the historical radar. Instead, their interest lies both in the here and now, in helping people get through their difficult lives, and in creating spiritual legacies. Yet these spiritual legacies are mostly lost, because for the most part they are not written down, especially when the historian's view begins with the idea that only physical evidence is sound evidence for legitimizing knowledge. To be sure, however, the dichotomy that I have created is not as clear-cut as it may seem. In many instances, these 'spiritual legacies' *did* leave physical evidence of their presence and influence. And, on the other side, some of what was created by those in power definitely was lost. The gaps in historical study on the Ottoman Empire are many. But these gaps can be lessened through a fair analysis of Ottoman history on their own terms. Thus, based on the lack of empirical evidence combined with the unconscious notion of the historian's job being to augment power, it is easy to see why the history of the Ottoman Empire today, beyond all the specifics of colonialism and Orientalism, does not include the vital role that the Sufis played.²⁴⁸ It is my contention, however, that the role of the historian of the Ottoman Empire should be to search for these lost traces of history, to do justice to the Ottomans of yesterday and the Turks of today. In a difficult leap of faith, then, the historian must work hard to look beyond the obvious surface remnants of history that still exist, toward the more hidden aspects of culture, and also must be strong enough to fight the strong current of political force that

²⁴⁸ An interesting study would be to research Sufi histories written by and about Sufis in the Ottoman Empire. Based on my logic, my hypothesis would be that the number of histories being written increased dramatically in the early 20th century, as Sufis began to sense that their time when near (and they realized that few historical traces had been left of their legacy).

guides one unconsciously toward legitimizing and augmenting those in power. This is a difficult task that requires wading through political views and a lack of physical evidence, but it can and must be done. Perhaps, to begin with, the Ottoman historian would do well to listen to the advice of al-Ghazālī in the quote already mentioned, looking for both that which is in ‘sight’ and that which is ‘insight.’

CHAPTER 4

HIJRA IN ISLAM: MIGRATION AS METAPHOR FOR AN ESOTERIC AND
EXOTERIC WORLD

“But the believers, and those who emigrate and struggle in God’s way – those have hope of God’s compassion; and God is All-forgiving, All-compassionate” -The Qur’an, 2:215

*“Jama’ah al-Muslimin believes in hijra as the only way to establish the Islamic state.”
-Muhammed Amin²⁴⁹*

“It has been said that the meaning of this [hijra] is ‘to shun’ lustful desires (shahawāt), blameworthy morals and sins and to avoid them and reject them.” - Rāghib al-Isfahānī²⁵⁰

In this chapter I will move from the specific historical time period and location of the Ottoman Empire to look the historical progression and usages of the term *hijra* (‘migration’) in the Islamic tradition. I will discuss the ways that this term has been used in both esoteric and exoteric ways by analyzing the theological, political and spiritual dimensions of this term. The above quotations point to the difficulty of this task based upon the wide range of meanings that Muslims throughout the years have attached to the term *hijra*. They are apt, however, for the thesis of this chapter: for within this wide range of meanings, there arises a connection between, on the one hand, the historical and the ever-changing dogma, practice and faith of Islam, and, on the other hand, the difficult yet foundational relationship between the inner (or ‘esoteric’) and the outer (or ‘exoteric’) nature of Islam. In Islam, according to the Qur’an, God is both immanent as in “nearer to

²⁴⁹249 Zafarul-Islam Khan, *Hijrah in Islam*, (New Delhi: Pharos Media and Publishing, 1997), 212.

²⁵⁰ Khan, 28.

him (man) than the jugular vein,” (Qur’an, 50:16) and distant, or transcendent, “He is God; there is no god but He. He is the King, the All-holy, the All-Peaceable”(Qur’an 59:22) . Through a study of the historical progression of *hijra*, this apparent paradox can be better understood. This chapter will analyze *hijra* with the idea that there are many veils of time and history that cover the true nature of the term as it exists in the Islamic tradition. The veils that will be explored in this chapter are: the etymological and Qur’anic roots of *hijra*, the stories of the Prophet Muhammad, the hadith and scholarly debate on the issue, and several historical uses of the doctrine, particularly in modern times.²⁵¹

The term *hijra* will be analyzed *linguistically, historically and theologically*, looking at both primary sources and at political and socioeconomic issues in relation to *hijra*. This point is well presented by Daoud Casewit, who argues that far too often contemporary studies of *hijra* do not take into account primary sources (Qur’an and *hadith*). For, “without an adequate knowledge of these primary texts, any attempt to investigate... [modern day *hijra*]... will at best be flawed.”²⁵² Further, a simplistic view of any tradition, or any concept of another tradition such as *hijra*, leads to what Khaled Abou El Fadl has argued is the puritanism of a group such as the Wahhabis.²⁵³ This puritanism cuts off the ability for a true and subtle understanding of any given tradition, and by employing this particular methodology, I hope to avoid such over-simplification and misunderstanding.

²⁵¹ Perhaps the most obvious example of a modern movement that uses *hijra* in its doctrine is the group known as al-Takfir wa-l-hijra, which is an extremist group in Egypt.

²⁵² Daoud Casewit, “Hijra as History and Metaphor: A Survey of Qur’anic and Hadith Sources,” *Muslim World* (April 1998): 105.

²⁵³ Khaled M. Abou El Fadl, *And God Knows The Soldiers: The Authoritative and Authoritarian in Islamic Discourses*, (New York, University Press of America, 2001). See Chapter One for a further discussion of El Fadl’s ideas.

While the term can be literally defined as ‘migration’ or ‘departure,’ this definition ignores a Muslim’s understanding of the term, an understanding which is pregnant with ideas of particular historical context, Muhammad, God, community, *Jihad*, and Islam. To understand *hijra* as ‘migration’ alone is to ignore the story of the Prophet, the deep significance of the term in the Qur’an, and the term as it has been used throughout history. A concept such as *hijra*, which is filled with historical meaning, is analogous to the English verb ‘to lynch.’ Whereas a non-English speaker might look up the word and see ‘to hang’ or ‘to kill by hanging,’ Americans understand the term in vastly different ways, ways that produce both an intellectual nod and a visceral reaction to a word so filled with history.²⁵⁴ Understanding the various shades of meaning of foundational terms in Islam like *hijra* better helps non-Muslims to understand beyond the word to the very core of the religion itself. This chapter, then, will look at *hijra* as a term, *hijra* as a historical reality, *hijra* as a religious ideal, and *hijra* as a doctrine.

It is my contention that just as there are many levels of reality that exist in Islamic theology between Man and God, so too are there many levels that exist between esoterism and exoterism in Islam. A simple dualistic view of *hijra*, specifically, and of Islam in general, is not sufficient to understand the very foundations upon which Islam and its belief systems are built. In understanding this complicated relationship that exists within *hijra* and Islam, one can better see the wide range of possibilities that exist in Islam, and one can better understand a tradition that can give rise to both the deeply felt love poems of Rumi on the one hand and the venomous speech of Osama Bin Laden on the other. By looking closely at the development of *hijra* through history, we can also

²⁵⁴ The term lynch immediately brings up memories of the Civil Rights struggle in the United States in the 20th century, wherein many African-Americans were killed by lynching, and thus the lynching itself

better understand the rise of extremist Islam. As such, this chapter will look at the relationship between *hijra* and *jihad* in Islam. As a secondary point, hopefully it will be made clear through this discussion that Islam is malleable, particularly to the hammer of historical circumstance, and its religious vocabulary, alive and vibrant, changes with the needs of this circumstance (within certain boundaries). As such, the current state of extremist Islam in much of the world today is perhaps best characterized as a historical movement, arising from the particular and difficult circumstances that the Islamic world has faced in the last few centuries. To understand *hijra* as it has been used throughout history is to understand the complicated relationship that exists in Islam between its inner, spiritual nature and its outer, political realities, and also to understand, at least in part, why modern Islamic extremism exists in the world today.

Methodology

The concept of *hijra*, in the Islamic tradition, is a complex and multi-layered term that has, on its surface, both a literal and a symbolic meaning. Literally, the term means “migration,” with clear connotations of the individual moving away from that which is bad toward that which is good. Symbolically, the term is tied up in the *Hijra* of the Prophet Muhammad in 622 C.E. and also in Qur’anic and *hadith* references. Additional meanings will be added to the term, as we shall see, as subsequent historical circumstances give rise to new paradigms of thought. Yet it is unfair, as some scholars point out, to view history and the historical progression of a term such as *hijra* into “sharply delineated periods” of a progressive nature, which as prominent Islamic Anthropologist Dale Eickelman asserts, “may encourage the assumption that there are

became a symbol for the severe oppression and violence of the majority community in the U.S.

dominant doctrines in any given time, unchallenged by competing doctrines and their carriers.”²⁵⁵ He goes on to say that

It is tempting, for example, to make the symmetrical argument that *hijra* in the classical period meant the obligation to migrate from non-Muslim lands (*dar al-kufr*) to Muslim ones (*dar al-Islam*), and that today the notion is principally metaphorical, implying only a spiritual migration.²⁵⁶

While this historical progression is attractive, it is nonetheless inadequate to understand the complexities of the term as it exists throughout history and in modern times. *Hijra*, like *jihad*, is not simply an esoteric, spiritual term in today’s world, nor is it merely a political term, and it is wrong to assume such. As Eickelman and Piscatori point out, there are many understandings of *hijra* today, including “transition from state authority to resisting it because of a growing realization of its illegitimacy,” “transition from poverty to a better life,” “transition from nomadic to settled life,” and even “emigration from a land where Muslims are in a majority but face poverty.”²⁵⁷

Islamic understandings of *hijra* are widely varied but all interpretations reflect a common theme: a debate concerning how to balance Islam’s inner and outer dimensions, and what Islam and the Land of Islam (*dar al-Islam*) actually consists of (which is essential for defining *when* one should emigrate). There are many lands that have been posited by the doctrine of *hijra*, which asks what lands one must migrate from. These include *dār al-Islam* (the Land of Islam), *dār al-Imam* (the Land of Belief), *dār al-ḥarb* (Land of the Enemy), *dār al-shirk* (Land of the Polytheists), *dār al-kufr* (Land of Unbelief), *dār al ‘ahd* (land of pact), *dār al-ṣulḥ* (land of truce), and *dār al-aman* (land of

²⁵⁵ Dale F. Eickelman and James Piscatori, “Social theory in the study of Muslim societies” in *Muslim Travelers: Pilgrimage, Migration and the Religious Imagination*, ed. Dale Eickelman and Piscatori (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 11.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

peace). All of these different lands reflect Muslim views not only of the *land* but also of the very *essence* of Islam. Is the Land of Islam a political or spiritual entity? When should one choose to leave this land? Studying the idea of *hijra* in Islam gets to the very core of one important aspect of Islam's identity, and raises important questions of its inner and outer dimensions, which are misunderstood in the West.

Hijra as Concept

The word *hijra*, in Arabic, is the verbal noun form of the Arabic root *hā', jīm, rā'*.

The word itself is perhaps best translated into English as 'migration.' Other possible definitions include 'abandonment,' 'forsaking,' 'abstention,' and 'separation from the beloved.' Various definitions of the verb from the same root, *hajara*, include, "to emigrate, to dissociate one's self from, to part, to secede, to keep away, to part company, to give up, to renounce, to forgo, to avoid, to abandon, to surrender, to be out of this world, to separate, to cut off."²⁵⁸ The word has also been translated in the past as "flight," but this definition is inadequate in its connotations, as it leaves out the important idea of an intentional movement away from bad conditions to a better place.

The overall connotation and intent of the term, both in its noun and verb forms, is one of leaving from that which is bad to that which is good, or moving from darkness to light. The vagueness of this definition is intentional, for it speaks to the multiplicity of meanings that the term has come to embody. *Hijra* has been used throughout the centuries as a political, social, theological and spiritual term. Sufis, for example, have taken the word and applied it to a spiritual migration away from one's lower self (*nafs*) to

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

one's higher self (*rūḥ*). As Daoud Casewit says, *hijra* has an underlying theme of “valiant resistance”²⁵⁹ to that which is bad. Others have used it, as we shall see, as a political term when Muslim lands have been threatened and/or reduced. What is clear about the term, however, is that it stresses the importance of journey: a journey, filled with ideas of freedom and personal communal responsibility, a journey that moves one away from persecution and oppression and toward a higher, safer, and clearer land.

In discussing the roots of this term, then, two broad themes emerge: the idea of a spiritual *and* a physical *hijra* and the close connection that *hijra* has with community and community-building. *Hijra*, in its purest form, asks its believers to move out of their own world and world view, where they identify themselves with their immediate family, tribe, or country, in order to join a new community that is united under God and the bond of the community itself. This movement thus creates a new identity in the one who emigrates (*mujāhidīn*) and has the connotation of being permanent, rather than a temporary, move. Thus *hijra* requires a loyalty beyond the tribe, and even in modern times beyond the nation.²⁶⁰ In emigration, moving out of one's limited worldview, abandoning the self for the community, true community can be found. As Humphrey Fisher argues, *hijra* is a liminal moment in Islam that is “crucial to group definition,” or community.²⁶¹ Thus, through *hijra*, there is a change in the very purpose for one's living: no longer is one living for one's self, but one lives first for the community, and for God.

²⁵⁸ Edward Lane, *The Arabic-English Lexicon*, (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1984, 2879-2880.

²⁵⁹ Casewit, 106.

²⁶⁰ This concept will come to be important in modern times, as will be discussed later.

²⁶¹ Humphrey Fisher, “Liminality, *hijra* and the city” in *Rural and Urban Islam in West Africa*, ed. Nehemia Levtzion and Humphrey J. Fisher, (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1987), 163.

In the Qur'an

The key theme of a physical and spiritual *hijra* is further developed in the Qur'an. The term *hijra* and its derivatives are used thirty times in the Qur'an, most often with the derivative *muhajarah*, meaning "emigration."²⁶² Perhaps the most debated and discussed verse is from the fourth Sura, *al-Nisā*, which says:

And those the angels take, while still they are wronging themselves – the angels will say, "In what circumstances were you?" They will say, "We were abased on the earth." The angels will say, "But was not God's earth wide, so that you might have *emigrated* in it?" Such men, their refuge shall be Gehanna – an evil homecoming! – except the men, women, and children who, being abased, can devise nothing and are not guided to a way; haply them God will yet pardon, for God is All-pardoning, All-forgiving. Whoso *emigrates* in the way of God will find in the earth many refuges and plenty; whoso goes forth from his house an *emigrant* to God and His Messenger, and then death overtakes him, his wage shall have fallen on God; surely God is All-forgiving, All-compassionate. (4:97-100, italics mine)

In this passage we find the Qur'anic foundation for the term in its political and spiritual meanings. On the one hand we find refuge and safety within the world, for "whoso emigrates in the way of God will find *in the earth* many refuges and plenty..." (4:100) Here we are introduced to the idea of the protection and good fortune that God will afford to us on this earth when we emigrate from conditions where we are persecuted. On the other hand one finds a more spiritual movement of the soul: "Whoso goes forth from his house an *emigrant to God and His Messenger...*" This passage gives the sense of an individual spiritual emigration to God rather than only a physical emigration. We emigrate to God, not just to other places on the earth. Thus, from these verses of the Qur'an it is clear that Muslims will find safety when they emigrate in the physical world. It is also clear that they must migrate spiritually toward God, and that when they do, God

will consider these Muslims faithful and holy. Both meanings of the term come to be applied by Muslim thinkers throughout the years. *Hijra* is also found in the Qur'an in the stories of past Prophets, such as Abraham.²⁶³

The Qur'an also gives rise to another connotation of *hijra*, which is the intimate connection between *hijra* and *jihad*. In many different Suras, the terms *hijra* and *jihad* are used together.²⁶⁴ For example, "Then, surely thy Lord – unto those who have emigrated (*hajara*) after persecution, then struggled (*jahada*) and were patient – surely thy Lord thereafter is All-forgiving, All-compassionate." (16:110) The deep and complicated history between *hijra* and *jihad* can be traced to this passage and those like it. *Hijra* is presented in the Qur'an as a precursor to a struggle. Again, of course, this has been interpreted literally in the sense of a physical move away from danger as the first step in regrouping with your community and getting ready to attack. It has also been viewed as a movement of the soul away from the danger of the *nafs*, with all of its attachments to the world, and the beginning of the 'greater *jihad*,' which is the struggle of the soul to overcome its dark tendencies and to remember God.

Hijra is used in the Qur'an as a call for the human soul to use its freedom in the world to move spiritually, physically, and politically toward the good. The concept of motion and action are fundamental to Islam, and they represent Islam continually being reborn both within the individual and within the larger politics of the physical world, and also Islam's ability to survive, even through the most difficult of times. This emphasis on

²⁶² Khan, 23.

²⁶³ For an excellent discussion of Abraham's *hijra* in the Qur'an, see Casewit, 106-110.

²⁶⁴ Qur'an, Sura 2:218, Sura 8: 72, 74-75, Sura 9: 20, Sura 16: 110, Sura 22: 58.

movement and journey of all sorts has been well documented.²⁶⁵ Within this emphasis on journey lies the heart of the connection between *hijra* and *jihad*: we must struggle for faith to exist, we cannot take it for granted, for it can leave our lives as quickly as it enters. In struggle, and in migration, we journey toward God.

As Historical Reality

Hijra, however, is a term that cannot be adequately understood without knowledge of the Prophet Muhammad and his *Hijra* from Mecca to Medina in 622 C.E. The *Hijra* of the Prophet was a spiritual and a social migration. Briefly, as the story goes, Muhammad, after having received revelations from God and disseminating these revelations to a small group of followers in Mecca for 12 years, was facing serious and sustained persecution in 622 C.E. for the perceived threat that this new religion and way of life would pose to the existing tribal order. For several years before this time, Muhammad sent new Muslim believers out of Mecca to emigrate to a small settlement called Yathrib (which would later come to be known as Medina). Upon hearing the news that an assassination attempt was being planned, Muhammad decided to make his famous emigration to Medina. This emigration was not made until pacts were made with the community at Yathrib assuring that the new Muslim community would be protected. Thus, embedded within the concept of *hijra* is the notion of a simultaneous asking and acceptance of help, or of asking for and receiving protection. *Hijra* is not a sudden impulsive action taken out of fear, but rather a rational, mature, thorough decision by a leader, with the simultaneous acceptance by another community. It requires cutting off

²⁶⁵ For a comprehensive view of different modes of Muslim travels, see Dale F. Eickelman and James

former ties with family, friends, and even the tribe or other social group that one belongs to; and asking one to join the religious community and submitting to God, trusting totally that God will correctly steer the community. After the Prophet migrated, all ties were broken with the old community, which consisted of both non-Muslims and Muslims who did not emigrate. In the newly formed community, both a practical community - allowing for such things as inheritance from one another - and a spiritual community - asking its Believers to come together, bound by religion - were formed. This community would later conquer the unbelievers in Mecca by waging *jihad*. This progression of *hijra* leading to *jihad* assumes greater significance in modern times.

The Prophet's *Hijra* marks the beginning of the Muslim community, as Muslims from this point on pledge their loyalty not to a particular tribe, but to Islam as a religion, thus creating the first true *umma*. This event in Muhammad's life also marks the beginning of Muslim history, as the Muslim calendar begins with this liminal moment defining thus 'before history' and 'history.' These two symbolic meanings of *hijra* – the beginning of sacred history and the beginning of the Islamic community – go hand-in-hand and reflect the larger notion of the importance and, indeed, the essence, of community in Islam. Islam and Islamic history begins with the needs of the community, in consort with the revelation of God to an individual. Muhammad, in fact, had been receiving the revelation of the Qur'an from God for roughly 12 years before the *hijra*. As Annemarie Schimmel puts it, Muslims begin their 'Sacred Age' from the time of the *hijra* because "at this point a decisive development of Muhammad's activities can be observed: the religious vision of the Meccan revelations had now to be put into

communal practice.”²⁶⁶ In this emigration are found all the core values of *hijra*: the beginning of Islamic history, the beginning of the Islamic community, emigration from persecution, and a clear defining of the Other. The importance of this term and this event is made most clear in a supposed saying of ‘Umar (the second Caliph), “*Hijrah* distinguished between Truth (*ḥaqq*) and Falsehood (*bāṭil*).”²⁶⁷ In this statement one can begin to understand the importance that Muhammad’s *Hijra* holds in Islamic history.

It is best to understand the *Hijra* of Muhammad both in historical and metaphorical terms. In historical terms, the *Hijra* was a major event in the history of the Arabian Peninsula and beyond. As A.M. Nasr points out, society on the Arabian Peninsula before Muhammad’s time was structured through the tribe, which was fragmented and unorganized at best, violent and relentless at worst.²⁶⁸ Arabian society at the time “was [in] a period when there was absolutely no administration and governance of the type which we find in a modern state.”²⁶⁹ The *Hijra* of the Prophet fundamentally changed the ways in which the Arabs peoples related to one another, and, “was the harbinger of changes that transformed Arabian society from one of considerable incoherence, hatred, in-fighting, and indiscipline into one which embraced the ideals of discipline, justice, love and brotherhood.”²⁷⁰ Many things about Arabian society were changed by the *Hijra*: religious ritual, social legislation, and even concepts of warring. Historically speaking, the *Hijra* fashioned order in an un-ordered society. People living

²⁶⁶ Annemarie Schimmel, *Islam: An Introduction*, (Albany: State University of New York, 1992), 15.

²⁶⁷ Khan, 14.

²⁶⁸ See A.M. Nasr, “The Structure of Society in Pre-Islamic Arabia and the Impact of *Hijra*: In A Traditional Archeology”, in *Golden Roads: Migration, Pilgrimage and Travel in Mediaeval and Modern Islam*, ed. Ian Richard Netton (Surrey: Curon Press, Ltd., 1993), 3-10, for a discussion of the impact of the *Hijra* on Pre-Arabian society.

²⁶⁹ A. M. Nasr, 8.

²⁷⁰ A.M. Nasr, 9.

on the Arabian Peninsula gave up their loyalties to only the small tribe that they were born to and embraced a new, larger society. For the first time, it produced “unity based on religious community rather than the tribe.”²⁷¹ The *umma*, or religious community, was created at this moment, and its members identified themselves not with self, history, or country, but with religion. This was the first society of Muslims loyal first and foremost to God and other Believers in God. Ultimately it was this small new society and community that would give rise to an explosion of powerful cultures, thinkers, artists, and leaders around the world.

Metaphorically speaking, the *Hijra* of the Prophet became the threshold that moved the world from the profane to the sacred age. Thus, *Hijra* has a very clear and powerful connection with the individual moving toward the sacred. *Hijra* is a community-forming event, but also an individual command to move toward the sacred within one’s self. This means a move toward goodness, compassion, and forgiveness, and all the other Divine Names of God. In short, we must emigrate back to God. For Sufis, the methodology for this emigration was through *dhikr*, or remembrance, of God. During the Prophet’s emigration, the story is told that Muhammad hid in a cave from those who were chasing Him. Miraculously, a spider spun a web in front of the cave after Muhammad entered, thus fooling the enemies who were chasing Muhammad into believing that no one could have entered the cave.²⁷² Thus Muhammad was saved from sure capture and death. The significance of the cave is important here, as Seyyed Hussein Nasr recently pointed out, for the cave comes to symbolize, in Sufi terms, the

²⁷¹ A.M. Nasr, 5.

²⁷² For the complete story see Martin Lings, *Muhammad* (Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions Ltd., 1983), 118-122, and Bukhari Book 57, Volume 5. Also see in the Qur’an 9:40.

very heart of man, where God lives.²⁷³ By seeking refuge in the cave, which is our heart, and doing the necessary work required to unveil the true Heart, we come closer to God. The Prophet Himself said, “the *muhajir* (one who performs *hijra*) is the one who shuns what God has forbidden.”²⁷⁴

The example of the Prophet’s emigration suggests both the individual moving away from that which is bad in our hearts toward the God that is within our hearts, and the community moving away from that which prevents Islam from being practiced and toward the safety of the community. Thus the Prophet’s *hijra* has become a key metaphor in a Muslim’s individual and communal identity throughout history. The genesis of the key themes of unity, community, and equality before God are all found in the important event of the Prophet’s *Hijra*.

As Religious Ideal

After the Prophet’s *Hijra*, the question arose as to whether the doctrine of *hijra* was obligatory upon Muslims after the Prophet’s death. The main issue that this question asks is this: what constitutes the land of *dār al-Islam*? Is it a physical place? A spiritual place? Does it require Islamic rule and government and law (*shari’a*)? Or does it just require a place where Muslims can peacefully practice their faith? Once *dār al-Islam* is decided upon, is it then obligatory to migrate to these lands, or is it simply recommended? When does it become an obligation: when there is no Islamic law (*shari’a*) in power? When there is no freedom of religion? Underlying all of

²⁷³ Seyyed Hussein Nasr, lecture at “Paths to God” conference, October 18-20, 2001, in Columbia, SC, “The Heart is the Throne of the All-Merciful”.

²⁷⁴ Ibn Hanbal, *al-Musnad*, XI, 58, 69.

these questions is the relationship that exists between Islam and politics.²⁷⁵ These questions, asked and answered by Muslim scholars throughout the years, has “helped to define the doctrine” of *hijra*.²⁷⁶

Moving beyond the time of the Prophet, one can detect in the concept of *hijra* the rise of a religiously understood ideal that has been passed down through the centuries. As Zafarul-Islam Khan states in his book *Hijrah in Islam*, “*Hijrah*, or migration, is an Islamic ideal which has inspired millions of people, both individuals and large groups, to emigrate from their traditional homelands to *dār al-Islam* (the land of Islam), during the last nine centuries.”²⁷⁷

The question, “Should Muslims continue to emigrate from lands of persecution and enemies (*dār al-ḥarb*) to lands of safety (*dār al-Islam*) after the Prophet’s death?” is a foundational query in the Islamic tradition that has been considered throughout Islamic history and that continues to be posed among contemporary Muslim scholars today.

The answer to this question is taken up by the Prophet Himself in the *hadith*, as well as by scholars throughout Islamic history who have interpreted the Qur’an and *hadith*.

Muhammad has apparently contradictory sayings about the *hijra*, which have led to much debate through the years. On the one hand, Muhammad said, “There is no *Hijra* (from Mecca to Medina) after the Conquest (of Mecca), but *Jihad* and good intention remain;

²⁷⁵ While this question will only be dealt with briefly because it is outside of the scope of this thesis, nonetheless there is clearly an interesting and fruitful discussion of Islam and politics would easily be generated through a discussion of *hijra*.

²⁷⁶ Muhammad Kalid Masud, “The obligation to migrate: the doctrine of *hijra* in Islamic law”, in *Muslim Travelers: Pilgrimage, Migration and the Religious Imagination*, ed by Dale F. Eickelman and James Piscatori (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 34.

²⁷⁷ Khan, *Hijrah in Islam*, 13.

and if you are called (by the Muslim ruler) for fighting, go forth immediately.”²⁷⁸

Interestingly, we see here that Muhammad has spoken to two issues. First of all, he seems to suggest that the concept of *hijra* has ended. Secondly, Muhammad, as in the Qur’an, mentions *hijra* in direct relation to *jihad*. Muhammad has made this connection of *hijra* and *jihad* in other hadith, including one in which he answers the question, “Which *hijra* is best?” with the answer “*Al-jihad*.”²⁷⁹ This very clearly suggests that *hijra* as a doctrine finished with Muhammad’s death, and that only “*jihad* and good intention remain.”

On the other hand, however, Muhammad said “*hijra* will not cease until repentance ceases, repentance will not cease until the sun rises from the place of its sunset.”²⁸⁰ Thus it appears here that *hijra* has not ended, and in fact must go on for all of earthly time. Scholars throughout the centuries have debated this issue, and it has been used at different times for different circumstances, with widely varying interpretations. Early scholars generally “refrained from giving any opinion on the advisability of *hijra* let alone pronouncing it to be obligatory.”²⁸¹ These scholars and commentators generally felt that *hijra* ended with Muhammad’s emigration to Medina. As Khan points out, these scholars were not generally faced with the prospect of a foreign presence inside *dār al-Islam*, and thus they could afford to interpret the doctrine of *hijra* as something that ended in Medina.

²⁷⁸ Translation of Sahih Bukhari, Book 52: *Volume 4, Book 52, Number 42*, taken from Khan, 64.

²⁷⁹ Khan, 64-65, citing Ibn Hanbal in al-Albani, *Sahih*, 1991.

²⁸⁰ Khan, 64-65, citing Al-Bayhaqi, IX, 17. It should be pointed out here that not all of these hadith are regarded as being of equal authenticity by Muslim scholars. Bayhaqi, for example, includes many hadith that are considered to be questionable according to hadith scholars. Nonetheless, they are useful for the current discussion.

²⁸¹ Khan, 28.

In medieval times, the Islamic tradition began to see “small Muslim communities living permanently under non-Muslim rule”²⁸² in places such as Sicily, Andalus, and the Levant. Because of this we begin to see a shift in thinking as Muslim scholars slowly begin pronouncing *hijra* as an obligatory act, or at least obligatory when Muslims are persecuted. The famous Sufi mystic, Ibn’ Arabi, for example, is one of the first commentators to make *hijra* obligatory.²⁸³ By making it obligatory, Ibn’ Arabi is obviously interpreting the doctrine of *hijra* as continuing in the present day. Others (such as al-Fadl al-Tabarsi²⁸⁴) see *hijra* as something that is necessary only when Muslims are persecuted.²⁸⁵ Particularly absent from discussion in the early and medieval periods is a discussion of *jihad* in relation to *hijra*. This is also the time when *hijra* begins to be interpreted by Sufis as a spiritual migration (beginning with al-Raghib al-Isfahani (d. circa 1108 C.E.).

Finally, scholars of the late Ottoman period wrote a great deal on *hijra*,²⁸⁶ its obligations, and its relationship to *jihad*. During this period, the Ottoman Empire was being conquered militarily and economically, and the lands of Islam were shrinking. Thus “people living under colonial rule were more concerned about ‘physical’ *hijra* (like Muhammad al-Tahir ibn Ashur (d. 1973 C.E.), Rashid Rida (d. 1935 C.E.), and Mawdudi (d. 1979 C.E.), while people living in the relative comfort of the Ottoman State (and therefore *dār al-Islam*) (like Isma’il Haqqi of Bursa (d. 1724 C.E.) and al-Alusi of Baghdad (d. 1854 C.E.) concentrate on the ‘spiritual’ *hijra* instead.”²⁸⁷ Of particular

²⁸² Khan, 54.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁴ Al-Tabarsi was a very well known 6th century H. Shi’a scholar who wrote a famous *Tafsir*.

²⁸⁵ Khan, 28-37.

²⁸⁶ Khan, 57.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

interest in the modern period is the movement of the relaxed ideas that scholars had about what constitutes *dār al-Islam*. These relaxed ‘borders,’ if you will, while tightened to the point of exclusion in good times, ultimately are forced to be relaxed in bad times as colonial powers take control of formerly Muslim lands. *Dār al-Islam* cannot, of course, be defined too stringently when most of the Muslim world is under foreign occupation, as it was in the early 20th century. It follows that *hijra* cannot be called upon when there are very few if any Muslim lands that are not divided or occupied. This is one interpretation of *dār al-Islam* in modern times. As we shall see later, however, another interpretation, very much contradictory, arises with the modern era.

From an analysis of the scholarly debate that has been done on the Qur’anic and hadith sources throughout the years,²⁸⁸ one can begin to comprehend a general trend: as time passes and the Islamic world becomes threatened by foreign powers, the doctrine of *hijra* and *dār al-Islam* tend to be interpreted more loosely. Early on, Muslim scholars generally tended to propose *hijra* as a more spiritual ideal, one that was not obligatory and that ceased with Muhammad’s movement to Medina. Later scholars, under threats from the outside, do two things: first, they change the doctrine to become more important in modern times, particularly in tandem with *jihad*, and second, they define the concept of *dār al-Islam* more loosely as more and more Muslim lands fall under foreign occupation. These two things allow for the Muslim world to survive in times of extreme difficulty and domination.

²⁸⁸ I borrow heavily here from Khan, who has a wonderful analysis in Chapter II and III of his book, *Hijra in Islam*. In this analysis, he divides Muslim scholarship into early (1st-5th/7th-11th centuries), medieval

From this analysis, two conclusions emerge. First of all, it is clear that Muslim scholars interpret *hijra* with the times, shaping their interpretations to fit historical circumstance. Thus, “the formulation of the doctrine at various historical junctures shows the discursive nature of intellectual arguments in the Muslim tradition” which have “been quite adaptable to varying political contexts.”²⁸⁹ Secondly, in times of difficulty, Muslim scholars either make *hijra* obligatory as a physical movement so that Muslims will be proactive or declare it to be only a spiritual journey in order to mollify the people. Depending upon the context, *hijra* can be interpreted esoterically or exoterically. In difficult times, with Islamic lands under pressure from foreign ‘enemies,’ *hijra* becomes much more important as a political, exoteric term.

Yet, in all instances, Muslim scholars and the people that they are speaking to must take into account both the physical and spiritual *significance* that is attached to the term from the Qur’an, Muhammad, and the *hadith*. These sources provide the levels that exist in Islam between the esoteric and exoteric: they imbue Muslims with the idea that there is both exoteric and esoteric in all that we do (even, and especially, in times of extreme suffering), and that there are many levels in the manifested world that exist between the exoteric and the esoteric. From an analysis of the concept of *hijra* in the Qur’an, the *hadith* and the scholarly commentary, we can begin to understand the unique and deep relationship that exists between Islamic doctrine and historical circumstance and also the many subtle levels of Islam that exist between its outer, exoteric dogma and its inner, esoteric spirituality. I will now turn to some modern examples of how *hijra* has been used in the world.

(6th-12th/12-18th centuries), and modern (13th-/19th- centuries). I will use these delineations directly from Khan.

As Doctrine

In modern times, the doctrine of *hijra* has become more difficult to define. As Masud points out, “with the rise of nation-states and a secular world-view, the definition of *dār al-Islam* has become increasingly problematic.”²⁹⁰ With *dār al-Islam* being reshaped into modern nation states and colonialism being a political reality for years, new thoughts about *hijra* have obviously arisen. With most of the Islamic world being taken over by foreign powers in modern times, the question of *hijra* has changed: before scholars struggled with the question of *from where* one should migrate, and now they ask from where one should *not* migrate.²⁹¹ New categories of Muslim land have therefore followed this pattern, including *dār al-‘ahd* (land of pact), *dār al-sulh* (land of truce), and *dār al-aman* (land of peace). These new imagined lands reflect the difficulty that Islam has faced during the past two centuries.

The modern world’s encounter with Islam is generally considered to begin with Napoleon’s invasion of Egypt in 1798 (although there were certainly many encounters before 1798). From this point forward, Muslim lands have been simultaneously shrunk and fragmented by colonial powers. In Islam’s encounter with colonialism in the modern period, the concept of *hijra* has been used more as a political doctrine that is an “essential expression of Muslim identity”²⁹² in today’s world. In fact, some scholars have argued that *hijra* “became a dominant theme in Islamic political thought.”²⁹³ *Hijra* has come to be a powerful metaphor for modern Muslims. With the rise of Islamic revivalism, many

²⁸⁹ Masud, 45.

²⁹⁰ Masud, 44.

²⁹¹ Masud, 44.

²⁹² Masud, 29.

“Islamic revivalist movements [shared] the belief that they were reenacting the paradigmatic drama of early Islam – establishing as the Prophet had done in the seventh century the rule of God on earth.”²⁹⁴

In opposition to some scholars who relaxed the idea of *dār al-Islam* with colonialism, many begin to interpret *hijra* within the modern world more stringently. With the shrinking of Islamic territory in the colonial period, the idea expands greatly that *dār al-Islam* existed only when Islamic law and government rules. This is best summed up by the modern Egyptian scholar, Sayyid Qutb, who argued that “If Islam is to be effective, it must rule.”²⁹⁵ *Dār al-Islam* has been seen in modern times by many as only the land where Islam rules, and striving for a rebirth of Islamic rule is the ultimate goal. As such, the doctrine of *hijra* becomes something that is obligatory upon extremist Muslims as a prerequisite to capture and rule lands that can once again be called Holy Islamic lands.

In modern times, it is useful to look at how *hijra* has been expressed in three different ways: *hijra* and Pan-Islamic movements, *hijra* and *jihād* (which has already been briefly touched upon), and *hijra* in relation to Islamic extremism. Understanding *hijra* in the modern world is absolutely vital to understanding the major themes that have captured the attention of the West, including *jihād*, terrorism, and religious violence. In each of these cases, one can see differing interpretations of the doctrine of *hijra* as well as a clear debate about the relationship between esoteric and exoteric Islam.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁴ John L. Esposito, *Islam and Politics (4th edition)*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1984), 41.

²⁹⁵ Esposito, 142, quoted from Sayyid Qutb, from Haddad, “Sayyid Qutb,” in *Voices*, ed. Esposito, 73.

Hijra and Pan-Islamism

Hijra has come to be used by Pan-Islamic movements in the modern era, as Muslims have logically called for a tightening and redefinition of borders when threatened by foreign powers. The wide borders of the pan-Islamic movement hoped to encompass all Muslims who live in the world, regardless of country. With this redefinition comes new fodder for the doctrine of *hijra*, as Islamic leaders have called for an Islamic movement across all national borders which include ideas of emigration (*hijra*) and struggle (*jihad*). In attempting to figure out what Islamic land *is* in the modern age, pan-Islamic leaders, including those in India and the Balkans, have used the doctrine of *hijra* for their own political purposes as part of larger Pan-Islamic movements.²⁹⁶ In dealing with colonialists, pan-Islamists turned to the idea of a larger Muslim community beyond all national borders that could solve problems of foreign domination. According to Qureshi, “To Muslims the concept of the universality of the Islamic polity, in spite of the apparent contradiction between the ideal and the real, is inherent in the faith.”²⁹⁷ Pan-Islamism existed in both the 18th and 19th centuries, but after the fall of the Ottoman caliphate in World War I, “an appeal for the political union of the widely dispersed Muslims of the world... was found to be much more attractive.”²⁹⁸

Within this union, leaders of the Pan-Islamic movements struggled with the concept of *hijra*, trying to determine where and when Muslims around the world should emigrate. Pan-Islamists had to figure out where Muslims around the world should

²⁹⁶ For a good discussion of these movements, see Qureshi, Sulaiman, etc.

²⁹⁷ M. Naeem Qureshi, *Pan-Islam in British Indian Politics: A Study of the Khilafat Movement, 1918-1924* (Boston: Brill, 1999), 9.

²⁹⁸ Qureshi, 9.

migrate to and if they should migrate at all. *Dār al-Islam* could be considered a place where Islamic law ruled, or where an Islamic leader ruled, or where Islam was free to be practiced, or where Muslim people lived regardless of the political situation (although this last formulation was rare). The question then became thus: when does *dār al-Islam*, however it is defined, become *dār al-harb*? Many in India followed the Hanafi interpretation of *hijra* and *dār al-Islam*, which stated that *dār al-Islam* changes to *dār al-harb* if the following three conditions occur:

- 1) the laws of disbelievers gain supremacy and no law of Islam be executed; 2) the Muslim and non-Muslim populations are no longer governed by the original pacts that they enjoyed before the non-Muslim occupation; and 3) the land in question is adjacent to the territory of dar al-harb such that there is no land of Islam between them.²⁹⁹

In this formulation, any change in government where Islamic law and rule is no longer evident and the country is not adjacent to *dār al-Islam* is no longer *dār al-Islam*.

Therefore, *dār al-Islam* is equated with political Islam and Islamic law (*shari'a*) being in power. This doctrine was used by Pan-Islamic leaders, particularly in the Balkans and India to justify a *hijra* away from foreign-occupied powers.

In India, Muslims were frustrated by British colonial power that had commenced in the early 19th century and had continued for over one hundred years. At the end of World War I (and the end of the Ottoman caliphate), many leaders in India used *hijra* as a political tool under the banner of Pan-Islam. They called for a mass migration to Afghanistan from India, as a protest and as a re-enactment of the Prophet's *hijra*. In the summer of 1920, thousands of Muslims migrated to Afghanistan from India. Ultimately,

this ended in disaster. The movement was probably doomed from the start, because it was not a mass political movement organized by Muslims in power, but rather a grassroots effort that had begun as a political tool against the British.³⁰⁰ The *Hijrat* movement in India, and many other Pan-Islamic movements, used the concept of *hijra* as their central doctrine in re-creating a new Muslim community. With colonialism, Muslims were living all over the world under non-Muslim rule. Only mass migrations of people, with an eye toward creating a unified Muslim community and country, could solve this problem for the Pan-Islamists.

Hijra and Jihad

Others, however, did not offer an interpretation of *hijra* that was so passive. As Khan says, “Leaders of Islamic movements have used *hijra* in both positive and passive ways. The first, positive, way was to mobilize Muslims in order to regroup and fight the local (Muslim) or foreign enemies...”³⁰¹ Many Muslims began to believe that *hijra* was only to be performed in conjunction with physical *jihad*, or holy war. One of the most successful of these movements was by Usman dan Fodio in Nigeria in the 18th century.³⁰² In this movement, Fodio re-enacted the movements of the Prophet, first calling for *hijra* before waging *jihad* and uniting many local tribes in the area under Islamic rule. This led to the development of the Sokoto Caliphate, which ruled peacefully (and Islamically) in

²⁹⁹ Masud, 39.

³⁰⁰ Qureshi, 174-232.

³⁰¹ Khan, 142.

³⁰² See R.A. Adeleye *Power and Diplomacy in Northern Nigeria, 1804-1906* (London: Longman Group Limited, 1971), B.G. Martin *Muslim Brotherhoods in Nineteenth Century Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), Ali Rahnama *Pioneers of Islamic Revival* (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1994), Ibraheem Sulaiman *A History in Revolution: The Jihad of Usman dan Fodio* (London: Mansell, 1986), and others for further reading.

the area for many years. Other examples of this “positive” use of *hijra* are found in Algeria, other areas of West Africa, and the Sudan.³⁰³

In this interpretation, *jihad* became the necessary step after *hijra*. In other words, without *jihad*, there is no *hijra*. *Hijra* is linked to loyalty given by the Muslim community to an imam or caliph, as the religious and political head of state. This formulation created a sharp turn in the interpretation of *hijra*. No longer was *hijra* a passive movement away from that which is bad. Instead, it came to be an active movement in order to prepare for war. In this interpretation one sees the beginning of Muslim extremism, as Muslim leaders began focusing their energy on recapturing once-Muslim lands through political and military means. *Dār al-Islam* becomes something that must be fought for, first by creating a community (and, in some cases, as we shall see, this community was an army) and then by attacking and conquering. Along with this idea comes the notion that even bad Islamic governments must be overthrown through migration and war.

Hijra and Extremist Islam

The final movement that has arisen with the doctrine of *hijra* in modern times comes from the extremist interpretation of Islam. In this interpretation, *hijra* is again a central doctrine which is an obligation for all Muslims living under non-Muslim rule. *Dār al-harb* comes to be equated with modern, Western society as imperialistic and un-Islamic in nature. The terms of this extremism are simple: the world is black and white, there is the good Islamic world and the bad un-Islamic world. This extremism at times ignores the inner essence of *hijra*. Again this mode of thinking arose from repeated

³⁰³ Khan, Chapter 5.

attempts and failures in the Muslim world to shed the effects of colonialism. For Sayyid Qutb, *hijra* was an absolute obligation of all Muslims in preparation for *jihad*, as “the Qur’an mandated the waging of war where God’s enemies prevented Islamic governance.”³⁰⁴ In this interpretation, Islam is reduced to a political entity, whose only goal and purpose is political in nature. Muslims must migrate to gain strength through community in order to attack non-Muslim lands. This starkly black and white rhetoric, which is also seen in reverse in the West, is over-simplified, ignoring the relationship between the esoteric and exoteric dimensions of Islam.

An example of *hijra* and modern extremism is found in Saudi Arabia, where many small communities arose in the early 20th century calling themselves *hijra* communities.³⁰⁵ These communities were formed from recent converts to the extremist Wahhabi doctrine of Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb. The religious solidarity among these new communities “was the Islamic rationale that enabled Abd al-Aziz to recruit a Bedouin army.”³⁰⁶ In these movements, *hijra* serves as a political tool for Muslim leaders to, in many ways, control the masses. The relationship between *jihad* and *hijra* can be seen in today’s world, as Muslim fighters from around the globe have gone to Afghanistan to defend the faith. In many ways, this relationship, which posits the need to wage war for a new *dār al-Islam*, is the core of the Muslim terrorist’s doctrine.

In the modern period, many formulations and reformulations of *hijra* have arisen, each within its own set of historical circumstances. *Hijra* as an ideal for Pan-Islam arises

³⁰⁴ Esposito, 144.

³⁰⁵ Roger Webster, “*Hijra* and the Dissemination of Wahhabi Doctrine in Saudi Arabia”, in *Golden Roads: Migration, Pilgrimage and Travel in Mediaeval and Modern Islam*, ed. Ian Richard Netton. (Surrey: Curon Press, Ltd., 1993), 12.

³⁰⁶ Esposito, 107.

in places (the Balkans, India) where colonial powers have ruled and is used as a passive political tool against these powers. *Hijra* and the rise of Islamic extremism forms a more positive, active interpretation of the concept, an interpretation that is deeply embedded in the concept of a physical *jihad* to overthrow the evil enemies that have taken over Muslim lands. In all of these formulations, the same term (with the same roots, the same Qur'anic and hadith passages, and the same stories of Muhammad) is used in widely different ways. This varying degree of interpretation reflects the difficulties that the Islamic world faces today: Can Muslims exist without a *dār al-Islam*? How does the Islamic tradition exist in light of the effects of colonialism? How should Muslims, individually and communally, orient themselves to the West? The debate that exists today in the Islamic world comes down to basic questions of the essence of Islam. Within this essence lies the esoteric and exoteric dimensions, embattled through foreign domination and misunderstanding, yet nonetheless foundational. Is Islam an inner, spiritual movement first? Or is it an outer, physical movement first? Various leaders, scholars, and others have attempted to answer these questions in light of the current political situation in the world.

Conclusion

The concept of *hijra*, explained and re-explained, interpreted and re-interpreted, has come down to us today from a rocky and complicated path. Getting at the heart of the term, like getting at the heart of Islam, is nearly impossible. The many veils of time hinder us from understanding its true meaning: from its linguistic roots to the Qur'an, the *hadith*, Muhammad's life, and down to modern usages of the term. At each stage *hijra* has picked up new meanings and interpretations as historical circumstances have

changed, and yet there is a core of meaning that has remained the same. A thorough analysis of the concept of *hijra* can show us more clearly the deep and developed relationship that exists between exoteric and esoteric Islam. In *hijra* one sees a meeting point, and a point of tension, between these two poles. Esoteric *hijra*, as esoteric Islam, exists simultaneously with exoteric *hijra* (and esoteric Islam). This leads one modern scholar to say that *hijra* is “consecrated migration; a severing of the fetters of this lower world with a view to what lies beyond.”³⁰⁷ In this definition one can find room for esoterism and exoterism, an inner and an outer movement.

Islam as a faith has no clear distinction between the esoteric and the exoteric, as there are many levels between them. It is in these many levels that one can find a solution to the paradox of God being distant and Absolute and God being within our hearts. In these levels, a world is created that posits man away from God, yet contained within God; exiled from God, yet connected and on a journey to God. In these layers, *hijra* comes to be seen *simultaneously* as a political, historical, horizontal goal (exoteric) and as a spiritual, ahistorical, vertical ideal (esoteric) to strive toward. This simultaneous nature is vital to understanding Islam: we can only migrate and reject our home at the same moment that we are accepted into another, and we can only migrate physically at the same time as we migrate spiritually. All emigrations are therefore “consecrated.” It is untrue to the tradition of Islam to view *hijra* (or *jihad*) – from the word, from the Qur’an, from the hadith, etc. - as merely a physical, legal command that is obligatory for Muslims. Although it has been used this way in certain contexts, such a usage limits one’s understanding of and compassion for Islam if only seen in this light. When

³⁰⁷ Casewit, 107.

Western scholars only focus upon the outward meanings of *hijra*, we are presented with a nice example of how external, foreign scholarship has focused upon, to the exclusion of all else, the extreme uses of such a term, devoid of its inner essence. The very utterance of this word in Islam is heard with both inner and outer meanings and purposes in mind.

Viewing *hijra* in this way, as a multi-layered, nuanced concept, is an important method for viewing all of Islam and gives rise to three conclusions. First of all, extremist Islam as it exists today, based in part on a truncation or reduction of the doctrine of *hijra*, is mainly a historical movement in response to modern conditions. It is unfair to equate the entire Islamic tradition with extremism, for Islam has room for mercy and wrath, forgiveness and judgment, just as God, as well, possesses these qualities. Some Muslims today, it must be stated, expresses themselves on the side of wrath. Yet there are also numerous and significant expressions of God's Mercy in the Islamic Tradition. As Michael Sells argues, the Qur'an presents a powerful combination of intimacy and awe in describing God.³⁰⁸ Further, the ninety-nine names of God are generally divided into two categories: those of beauty and those of wrath or awe. Thus, the term *hijra* can be seen as a receptacle of both the beautiful and the wrathful, the inner and the outer, and it changes with the times. The doctrine of *hijra* is flexible, and Masud offers that the reason for this flexibility is what he terms "a semantics of expectation."³⁰⁹ Society, in other words, comes to expect new interpretations of a term based upon historical conditions, and with these expectations comes acceptance. Thus in modern extremist Islam, there are those who accept *hijra* as merely a precursor to war, a holy war that is to be fought against the

³⁰⁸ Michael Sells, *Approaching the Qur'an*, (White Cloud Press, Ashland, Oregon, 1999), 26ff.

³⁰⁹ Masud, 45.

West. Many times these interpretations are far too exoterically based, ignoring the inner aspects of Islam.

Secondly, *hijra* gives us the idea that Islam is a religion of community.

Community in Islam comes first for it is what gives us unity: one performs *hijra* in order to help create and join a community and this community becomes the most vital point of departure for the religion of Islam to exist and for man to be in the best possible shape to face God. In passing through a threshold with *hijra*, the past is forgotten, and the heart is cleansed and opened to a new community. *Hijra* creates the terms of the boundaries of this community by defining what belief is and how one can attain it. Thus, community comes first in Islam. As Seyyid Hussein Nasr puts it, “The function of religion is to bestow order upon human life and to establish an ‘outward’ harmony upon whose basis man can return inwardly to his Origin by means of the journey toward the ‘interior’ direction. This universal function is especially true of Islam...”³¹⁰ A peaceful community is the medium for a proper journey by the individual to God. Islam is a religion that first strives to create social, outward, exoteric order so that its believers may then peacefully pursue the Path to God esoterically.

Finally, it can be concluded that there is a very real relationship between the esoteric and exoteric in Islam. Within the religion of Islam lies an interconnected space between its exoteric and esoteric dimensions: this space allows for people such as Bin Laden and Rumi to exist under the umbrella of the same tradition. In many ways Islam is a conversation between these two opposing forces: which land is real – political or spiritual? Which land is illusory? Which land comes first? Which land defines the

other? Islam creates a vast space between its exoteric and esoteric dimensions, yet forcefully articulates a connection between the two.

A central tenet of Sufism is that the physical, temporal, manifested world is only temporary, “a dangerous snare on the way to God.”³¹¹ As the Qur'an (Surat al-Rahmān) states, "Everything on it [the earth] passes away, but the face of your Sustainer, the possessor of Grandeur and Unending Generosity, remains."³¹² Ultimately, in Islam, only God is real. But Islam says this clearly, confidently, and powerfully, with no fear of pantheism, and no fear of negating the world that we live in. The esoteric nature of Islam does not negate the exoteric; on the contrary, they define one another. They are intimately and ultimately related as concepts given to us by God. The levels that exist between the two serve as real signs in an ultimately illusory world, signs that tell us that our world and God are connected at all times, however far away we might seem. Western understanding of Islam would be well served to understand these levels, and the idea that, in Islam, these levels bind each individual to that which is good (God), and move the larger community toward that which is just (community). It is dangerous and unwise in our current culture to view Islam as merely a political, extremist, warring enemy. If we are to avoid this, we would do well to listen to the very doctrine of *hijra* itself and migrate our thoughts and our biases about Islam (and thus our hearts) away from the meanness of individual Judgment and toward the openness of communal Forgiveness.

³¹⁰ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Life and Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981), 191.

³¹¹ Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 109.

³¹² Translation by Dr. Alan Godlas of the University of Georgia.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The Guest House

*This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.*

*A joy, a depression, a meanness,
Some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.*

*Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,
still, treat each guest honorably.
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.*

*The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
meet them at the door laughing,
and invite them in.*

*Be grateful for whoever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.*

-Rumi ³¹³

We live in a world that stresses the external. In short, the modern world prioritizes external, material knowledge over the esoteric, inner knowledge of the heart. Historical, political, linguistic and cultural methodologies that focus only upon the external are the direct result of this epistemology. One of the effects of this epistemology is the rise of extremism both within Islam and in Western constructions of Islam. This

externalizing of the Islamic tradition is exactly what Traditionalists like Seyyid Hossein Nasr and Frithjof Schuon are arguing against. They believe, as I do, that a return to Traditional Islam is needed to fight against the powers of faction and extremism.

I argue throughout this thesis that it is important to return to the Islamic tradition, which included intimately related concepts of its inner and outer dimensions, and thus urban *and* rural, orthodox *and* heterodox, and popular *and* courtly Islam. Extremist movements in Islam are characterized by either a loss of tradition as generated by the people (in the form of oppressive dictatorships and authoritarian Islamic regimes) or a loss of Tradition as institutionalized by elite Islamic scholars (in the form of grass-roots movements that have no basis in the Islamic tradition). Extremism in Islam helps to create and is also created by extreme Western constructions of Islam, which have come mainly from the modern West.

As we have seen, in historical, political and theological terms, there is a clear connection between the rise of extremism in Islam and the extreme constructions of Islam in the West. These ‘extremisms’ are the direct result of the modern world’s position vis-à-vis knowledge and its relationship to its Sacred Source. Extreme manifestations of Islam (such as Wahhabism and Salafism) and extreme constructions of Islam help to create and sustain one another. The Islamic tradition itself is affected by Orientalist representations that focus only upon its outward *form*, and modern movements within Islam (especially Wahhabi-based movements) validate Western constructions of Islam.

For modernists, the world has, to a certain extent, become what Timothy Mitchell calls the “world-as-exhibition,” in which “reality, it turns out, means that which can be

³¹³ *The Essential Rumi*, translated by Coleman Barks, (Harper: San Francisco, 1995), 109.

represented, that which presents itself as an exhibit before an observer.”³¹⁴ While Mitchell’s book is dealing with the ways in which the British ordered and colonized Egypt, he says himself in his Preface that his aim is more broad. In his words, “This book is not a history of the British colonization of Egypt but a study of the power to colonise.”³¹⁵ Citing such scholars as Martin Heidegger³¹⁶ and Jacques Derrida³¹⁷, Mitchell’s argument, looking to find “the place of colonialism in the critique of modernity,”³¹⁸ is based upon the notion that modernity, as Huston Smith says, “registers nothing that is without material component... [thus the]...immaterial realities at first dropped from view and then (as the position hardened) were denied existence.”³¹⁹ Without a sense of the immaterial, modernity has easily allowed for the flowering of representation as reality, with no underlying substance, or essence, to speak of. Thus, modernists argue that things become real only *when* and *as* they are represented. Reality itself is defined only by those things that can be externalized, in material form, in a representative fashion. The hidden essence of reality (the Unseen that I spoke of in the Introduction), which is contrasted with (yet an integral part of) the material world, plays the role of a check against the over-growth of representations of reality and, ultimately, the replacement of reality itself with the represented. In a very concrete way, modernity’s ontology has separated human beings from the real-ness of things, for in

³¹⁴ Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 29.

³¹⁵ Mitchell, ix.

³¹⁶ See, for example, Martin Heidegger, “The Age of the World Picture,” in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt, (New York: Harper and Row, 1977).

³¹⁷ See, for example, Jacques Derrida, “The Double Session,” in *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*

³¹⁹ Huston, Smith, *Why Religion Matters: The Fate of the Human Spirit in an Age of Disbelief*, (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2001), 19-20.

making representation a necessary precondition for reality, we (as moderns) are separated from the *essence* of things.

Traditionalists, in contrast to modernity, ironically cohere with modernity's ontology in that all things in the material world are relatively real. However, as I have shown, their major disagreement lies in the fact that in the ontology of many modernists, there is no essence behind the representations; only the representations themselves, and the subsequent eternal and individual interpretations of these representations, become real. For Traditionalists, on the other hand, there is a clear sense of the existence of the essence of things as unchanging, unseen archetypes that order the world.³²⁰ For modernists, this order is created only by the rational human mind. Human beings in this view naturally compete for the *best* representation of reality and order, which often times ends up being the one that expresses the most control and power over things. Modernity is missing both the unseen and the understanding (which is made evident by the unseen) that things that are represented have lost something of their essence. The unseen is unconcerned with material things, because it is by its very nature non-material. It is therefore unconcerned with power over material things. In the space between the unseen, esoteric unity of reality and the material, exoteric manifestations of reality, one finds the vague residue of the essence of Truth itself. This concept cannot be comprehended if the esoteric has been marginalized, because the space between the two concepts (esoteric and exoteric) no longer exists when this marginalization occurs.

³²⁰ For more on this, see William Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-'Arabi's metaphysics of imagination*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989).

I have offered in this thesis two examples, among many, of instances where the modern world (both within Islam and outside of it) has cut Islam off from its essence and represented the tradition itself as only a material exhibition. In looking at the historiography of the Ottoman Empire, one can detect many gaps that need to be filled concerning the major roles that the Sufi orders played in much of the narrative of the Empire itself. These orders have been marginalized, and thus the physical representation of Islam's inner dimensions – the Sufi brotherhoods of the Ottoman Empire – have been marginalized and nearly erased from history. In the relationship between the Sufi orders and the rest of the Ottoman Empire – its people, *ulama*, sultans, foreigners, etc. – one finds the locations of the Islamic tradition. In tracing the ways in which the concept of *hijra* has progressed through time, one again sees the clear connection between the esoteric and exoteric dimensions of Islam.

Extremism comes in many forms, from many voices, and through many veils. As I have shown from my analysis of modernity's ontology, extremism arises from the fear and insecurity of a world that has lost its fundamental trust in the unseen, the unknowable, and the mysterious. The unseen provides fertile ground from which a humble and sincere understanding of the necessary relationship between individual piety and communal justice can grow. Extremism has arisen in our world today in two distinct forms, in vastly different locations (Orientalist constructions of Islam and Wahhabi-based manifestations of Islam); yet these two forms have come from a similar epistemology whereby knowledge relies only upon the material for its validity. Saying that Islamic extremism is the cause of Orientalist extremism, and vice versa, is inaccurate if one views either side as being the sole cause of the other. Western constructions of Islam have *not*

directly and solely caused the rise of extreme Islam. This claim would be unfair to Islam itself, assuming that its shape is affected only by the West. Neither have extreme movements within Islam caused Westerners to view Islam only externally. Both extremisms have risen from the forces of modernism that push for the externalization and materialization of the world and of knowledge. This is not to say that they do not affect one another, for they certainly do. But this effect comes from both sides. So is the world condemned to a battle of extremisms? The future is unclear, but scholars can nevertheless assert that because Tradition presents another possibility, there is hope for a day when extremism will fade, but only if, the forces of Tradition and the 'middle path' rise and speak out.

In the end, what I have shown in analyzing the Islamic tradition, Sufism in the Ottoman Empire, and the concept of *hijra*, is that there have been many dichotomies created to understand and categorize different aspects of Islam. In so doing, these dichotomies offer helpful insight into Islam. However, these dichotomies can also be extremely precarious in nature, especially when one forgets the important relationship between the two. In intentional and unintentional ways, these dichotomies can serve to separate out elements of Islam that probably should not be seen as separate. In this intellectual separation, a control is gained over both aspects. In terms of the esoteric and the exoteric in Islam, this separation has served to marginalize the esoteric; and has focused study and knowledge of Islam mostly upon its outward forms. In generating a construction of Islam that is mostly form without an esoteric dimension, it is easier to manage, re-shape and ultimately control that tradition.

Although it may seem that the very dichotomy of the esoteric and exoteric natures of Islam that I use as the basis of this thesis is unfair to the tradition itself, in fact it is not the dichotomy itself, but rather a misunderstanding and at times an absolutist understanding of it that is the problem. In the Ottoman Empire, for example, a misunderstanding of this dichotomy has led to a complete denial of a major component of the Ottoman, and now the Turkish, legacy. The Sufi orders have been swept under the rug by those more interested in material and worldly power that characterizes modernity. In relation to the Islamic *hijra*, the term has come to be simplified to the extreme, again undercutting the very generative power of Islam that has allowed it to thrive for centuries.

The esoteric dimension of Islam (which comprises roughly one half of the Islamic tradition) has been ignored by many inside and outside of Islam in modern times. In so doing a malformed view of Islam emerges which is a danger to the lives of many individuals and communities caught in the crossfire of an imagined clash of civilizations. A return to the idea that the Islamic tradition has always been created and sustained by forms of dialogue between the people and the elite, the Sufis and the orthodoxy, rural and urban folk, the esoteric and the exoteric, the popular and the courtly, the orthodox and the heterodox, will lead to a deeper awareness and understanding of the basic nature of Islam as a system for individuals and communities. A move beyond such simplistic dualisms to dialogic understanding will allow for clearer communication across religious, cultural and political boundaries. Finally, if scholars can make such a move into a dialogic understanding, Islam in all of its forms – political Islam, mystical Islam, economic Islam, legal Islam, etc. – will not be viewed as a rigid, backward, harsh tradition, but will be seen as another religious tradition reminding people of their duties to God, themselves,

and others, and providing a wide path upon which to move closer to the good and the just.

Finally, my refocusing our understanding of Tradition to emphasize a dialogic quality in the generation and institutionalization of knowledge questions the very role of the modernist scholar and the ways in which human beings hold and shape knowledge. For Jean François Lyotard, the role of knowledge has changed in the postindustrial/postmodern age. Knowledge has become “exteriorized,” ceasing “to be an end in itself,” losing “its use-value,” so that it has become a “commodity” that has been “mercantiled.”³²¹ Knowledge has been reduced to “the optimization of the global relationship between input and output – in other words, performativity.”³²² In this statement, Lyotard sounds suspiciously like the Traditionalists.³²³ In analyzing the recent history of knowledge, he argues that in one of the two major ‘legitimators’ of knowledge, in which “knowledge finds its validity not within itself, not in a subject that develops by actualizing its learning possibilities, but in a practical subject,”³²⁴ humankind becomes more interested in “the production of knowledge (research) than its transmission.”³²⁵ The role of the scholar in many instances is no longer to transmit ancient Wisdom but to produce new ideas. Lyotard therefore speaks of the current times as “the knell of the age of the Professor: a professor is no more competent than memory bank networks in

³²¹ Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

³²² Lyotard, 11.

³²³ Indeed there are many connections to be made between post-modernism and Tradition, but this is outside the scope of this thesis.

³²⁴ Lyotard, 35.

³²⁵ Lyotard, 53.

transmitting established knowledge, no more competent than interdisciplinary teams in imagining new moves or new games.”³²⁶

Cultural historians assert that one of the ontological qualities of modernity is that God has been marginalized and knocked down from the top of the hierarchy of being by modernity.³²⁷ Interestingly, once a hierarchy with God at the top has been toppled (which happened during the Enlightenment, according to Nasr³²⁸), one would think that human beings were freed from the bondage of an over-bearing God. On the contrary, however, history is beginning to teach us that the thick mud of subjectivity, which has arisen in the fields of materialism, relativism and individualism, is less liberating and more constricting, less communicable and more self-centered. Who is to judge what power is constructive or not, and what scholarship is helpful or hurtful? The role of the scholar as communicator is thus diminished by the scholar’s own thoughts, and the role of reader is transformed into one of silent confusion, in large part because interpretation and discussion of text becomes an expression of authority with no judge.

The loss of freedom in much of modernist scholarship is directly related to the scholarship of the powerful. If Lyotard is correct, then modern Universities exist no longer “to train an elite capable of guiding the nation towards its emancipation, but to supply the system with players capable of acceptably fulfilling their roles at the pragmatic posts required by its institutions.”³²⁹ And further, when Lyotard says, “Scientists, technicians, and instruments are purchased not to find truth, but to augment

³²⁶ *Ibid.*

³²⁷ See Mark Taylor, *Erring: A postmodern a/theology*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

³²⁸ See Nasr, Seyyed Hossein, *Knowledge and the Sacred*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989).

³²⁹ Lyotard, 48.

power,”³³⁰ I argue one can also find this need to augment power in much of modernist scholarship. Scholarship in the world of modernity in many cases follows closely behind the victors, writing legitimating arguments explaining why the powerful are powerful and why the weak are weak. I am not contending, of course, that there is no connection between the events of the world, power and the victors, and Truth, for certainly a connection between the events of the world and the Divine Will can and should be used, but we must always remember that this practice is a tricky business. This is because, due to the extreme externalization of knowledge, knowledge is only pursued by modernists in its external forms. Thus, those who win the power struggle in the external world (i.e. in the material world) take control of the only reality that exists: the exoteric world. Any sense of an inner struggle and victory is ignored and written out of modern man’s memory and history in modernity.

To put it plainly, meaning is still regarded as being God-generated in the majority of the world, yet many modernist religious scholars ignore this fact. Where meaning is regarded as being human-generated and constructed is - not coincidentally - mostly where the powerful reside (which is in the West). Freedom in scholarship can come, ironically, when human beings dialogically accept the limits imposed upon them by the Divine (which is unlimited and eternal); for it is in this space that human inquiry, humble in nature, pursues with depth answers to questions, answers that we know are only partial. We must, as scholars, be not only logical, consistent and intelligent, but also wise, morally good, and compassionate. Scholarship is most beneficial when it concerns itself with knowledge and wisdom, piety and justice. This freedom allows scholars to teach

³³⁰ Lyotard, 46.

and research from a position of clarity: clarity in balancing our inner wisdom and outer knowledge, clarity in recognizing the connections between the esoteric and the exoteric, and clarity in understanding that Tradition, although in origin is primordial, in manifestation is created in the interplay of the center and the edge, and thus not only the powerful but also the weak must be included in our memory. It is here, in the middle path of dialogue and seeing the interrelatedness of the center and edges, that extremism disappears, and a compassionate and broad path (*al-mustaqīm*) of humility and justice opens to all.

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