

Salafi Utopia: The Making of the Islamic State

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I. Introduction

"Every new generation is getting worse."

-- Hadith¹ of the Prophet Muhammad

"Now our policy is to reform the people, not the regime."

-- Khaled al-Fauwaz, Saudi Salaf²

The context of political Islam's rise, particularly the Salafi branch, is regarded by many in the West as the key to understanding its true purpose. The politicization of Salafi movements was a response to colonialism, intended to exert pressure to end foreign domination. A major part of Islamist political movements is the call to faith, which lies close to the heart of all Muslims whether or not they are Islamists. The Islamist movement is essentially, then, a call to abide by the religious principles that are already deeply embedded in the consciousness of the majority.³ Yet many accounts of Salafism, even by Salafis themselves, fail to address the interior psychological drive underlying the movement -- what I call the imagination at its base. Though Salafism relies on the

reconstruction (through politics and culture -- material reality) of a past historical moment in the present, few scholars have addressed the role of memory in the construction of Salafi political and social realities. The Salafi project of a global return to a Golden Age of Islam (something of a utopia⁴ in the Muslim imagination embodying both a political totality as well as a Foucauldian episteme) reflects a widespread fear in the Muslim ummah⁵ of spiritual corruption and, because the ummah is defined by its shared spiritual faith,⁶ the loss of unity and identity.

I argue that Salafi's envisioned society is utopian precisely for its impossibility, for its purely imaginative status. Indeed, the memory of Islam's Golden Age is complete fantasy, a product of selective memory. The Golden Age of Islam is remembered as the period of "pure Islam," when, because Muslims practiced their faith perfectly, God rained down His blessings on them, ensuring their military and economic success and as well as their cultural dominance.⁷ Not accidentally, this period also coincides with the West's Dark Ages.⁸ It was a utopic moment in the history of Islam precisely because it never really existed, except in the contemporary Salafi imagination.

One analyst who conducted interviews among Islamists reports on the material impossibility of the Salafi Utopia:

When the militants are persuaded to spell out their ideology, attitudes, and feelings, the listener comes away with an overall impression of what they are against but with only a vague, though colorful, impression of what they would do if they were in power. They have deep-seated hostility towards the West, Communism, and Israel. Any ruler who deals with or befriends any of them would be betraying Islam. Excessive wealth, extravagance, severe poverty, exploitation and usury have no place in a truly Muslim society. They disapprove of nearly all the regimes in the Arab and Muslim worlds. They attribute many of the decadent aspects of behavior to . . . Western influence or the squandering of oil money, and they firmly believe that should "true Islam" be implemented . . . the Muslim world would be independent, free, prosperous, just and righteous societies.⁹

It is interesting to note the unrealizable extremes of the Salafi Utopia -- the intense hatred against the West and what are in the Salafi imagination its proxies in its assaults on Islam -- Communism and Israel -- and the idealistic hopes for absolute social, political and financial equity within the "truly Islamic" society. It is also interesting to note that though "true Islam" is never defined, the notion of what it is persists in the Salafi imagination and emerges not once, but multiple times in the answers given. This suggests that whatever this undefined "truly Islamic" society may look like is a shared vision based in a shared history. And yet future Salafi Utopia never seemed more impossible. There is no returning to a past of unadulterated purity. What can this portend?

For the Muslim in general and the Salaf in particular, the Golden Age of Islam is remembered as a period of military strength, cultural superiority and, most importantly,

unity among the ummah of believers. The progressive breakdown of the Muslim ummah since this period marks a turning point in the history of Islam. According to the Salaf, something had gone gravely wrong in the house of Islam. The colonization of the Muslim world in the eighteenth century and, its social, political and cultural degradation after the fall of this vast Muslim empire, could thus only be registered in the Muslim imagination as consequences of a loss in Islamic faith, the result of the turn toward a secular society. The social and political turmoil that followed therefore became, retrospectively, signs of Gods displeasure with Muslims for their disobedience. According to Salafi narratives of Muslim history, then, the demise of the Muslim empire was therefore a consequence not of military failure or material changes so much as it was a sign of the spiritual corruption of Muslims.

The heightened fear of change which characterizes the Salaf therefore is a direct result of the Western colonization of the Muslim World in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and the burgeoning processes of globalization¹⁰ in the postcolonial era, a process dating from roughly the mid-twentieth century to our contemporary moment.¹¹

What makes Salafi movements noteworthy in contradistinction to the "average" Muslim discussed thus far is the role of the *conscious* memory in the Salafi's references to the past. In other words, the Salaf willfully brings Islam's unifying history back into the fore rather than allowing that history to remain in the background of the imaginative field. Indeed, the Salaf's memory is distinct from the imaginative and memorial space of the "average" individual Muslim in that Islamic history is totalizing for the Salafi's existence. The historical as envisioned by the Salaf becomes the model for his everyday life,¹² like a script, whereas this may not be true for the average Muslim. Furthermore, the Salafi sees in the past the blueprints for future action. In the Salafi imagination, then, the corruptive factor standing in the way of potential Utopia is the West.

II. The Role of History in Islam and Salafism

According to R. Stephen Humphreys, "All the forms of Islam throughout the world, disparate and varied as they are, spring logically and historically from a common source - the word of God as given in the Quran and the life and teaching of His chosen prophet Muhammad."¹³ The prevailing Muslim emphasis on unity stems from this shared source and dates back to Islam's early history. The logic of oneness or *tawhid* was meant to serve the cause of the early Muslims to spread Islam and therefore argued that because there was only one God, the whole world should unite to form one ummah. The contemporary vision of unified ummah in a Salafi Utopia is thus further reinforced by the underlying foundation of the ummah: the Islamic notion of unity or oneness as conveyed in the Quran.

According to Freud, obsessions with the past and memory -- especially the kind of obsession which characterizes the Salaf -- reflects a psychological drive toward the creation of a sense of subjective unity:

Genuine memory determines "whether the individual] can have a picture of himself, whether he can master his own experience," because "[m]emory forges the chain of tradition that passes events on from generation to generation."[14](#)

This is crucial to any understanding of Salafism because of the role of memory in the Salaf's subjective constitution and the threat to his subjective constitution posed by Western colonialism. Because Western colonization and the recent processes of globalization erase the cultural and traditional distinctions the Salaf relies on to posit his own identity, the imaginative space that once separated the Salaf's vision of Islam from the rest of the world is blurred over. The Salaf therefore clings more tightly to his traditional and religious identity by returning to what he imagines is a "purer," unadulterated version of Islam. Because the Salaf cannot sustain the weight and power of capitalism's material reality and the West's overwhelming hegemony, he retreats to the farthest fields of the Muslim imagination and becomes, as part of a compensatory measure, a true religious fanatic.[15](#)

The question of subjective unity can be expanded to discussions of the group. Benjamin broadens Freud's theory of the role of memory in individual subjectivity formation to discuss the formation of the historical or the social group. The Salafi obsession with the ummah's survival and growth coincides with Benjamin's identification of memory in social constructions. Benjamin suggests that the memory of a group's past is invoked as a defensive measure against the shocks of the present, which threaten to undermine the foundation of the group. According to Jameson:

This idea [persistence of memory in drives toward unity] becomes an instrument of historical description, a way of showing how in modern society, perhaps on account of the increasing number of shocks of all kinds to which the organism is now subjected, these defense mechanisms are no longer personal ones. . . .[16](#)

The shocks of colonialism and, presently, globalization form the two shocks against which the Salaf recalls the Golden Age of Islam. For the Salaf, whose way of life depends on a dramatic continuity of Islamic history in the present, Western colonialism of the Muslim world and, now, Western-based globalization have proven doubly traumatic. Not only do the movements of global capital emanate from a foreign and historically hostile source (i.e. the West), but they also threaten to sever the Salaf's connection to the past, his basis of identity. Western colonialism, through a calculated process of anti-Islamic rhetoric and propaganda,[17](#) and, most recently, the processes of globalization must destroy everything in their path in order to supplant the traditional demands of the indigenous culture with those of capital.[18](#) By displacing Islamic orthodoxy and undermining the importance of Islamic history, the twin bulwarks of Western hegemony in the last century -- colonialism and globalization -- threaten to destroy that which gives life to and sustains the Muslim ummah.

Recalling a Golden Age of Islam allows the Salaf to recoup his identity while simultaneously protecting the ummah from controversies about Islam's authenticity. It is this sense of a legitimating past rendered sacred by the presence of the Prophet and the first Muslims that has historically shaped Muslim religious imaginaries and has been integral to maintaining unity in the face of foreign obstacles and internal dissension.¹⁹ In the wake of the colonial period and the carving up of the Muslim World, the Salaf's imaginative retreat to this mythical Islamic past helps him to maintain a sense of psychic and communal unity. Indeed, it is this sense of time -- "undefiled, sacred, unbroken"²⁰ -- that is the very foundation of the ummah's identity. Highlighting the almost magical quality of his past, then, allows the Salaf, at the very least, an imaginative refuge in the mixed totality of the postcolonial Muslim World.

Benjamin's notion of conscious memory can thus be extended in the case of Salafism because of the role of the imagination in overdetermining Salafi memory. According to Žižek, communities are formed when the members of that community have a shared relationship toward a "Thing," what Žižek calls "enjoyment incarnated."²¹ For the Muslim, and even more so for the Salaf, this is a certain attitude toward the Islamic past. Though "This thing," be it an attitude or belief, inhabits a nebulous, imaginary space in the subjectivity of the group, it is nonetheless the thing which gives plenitude and vivacity to the life of the group. What's more, there is something present in this "Thing" that gives it meaning: "Members of a community who partake in a given 'way of life' *believe in their Thing*. . . . The national Thing exists as long as members of the community believe in it; it is literally an effect of this belief in itself."²² For the Muslim, the "Thing" which gives meaning and structure to life is a basic belief in the singularity and superiority of Islam.

Following along the same lines, Žižek argues that fundamentalisms, like nationalisms, emerge when the link holding a community together is threatened: the relationship toward the "Thing," structured by means of fantasies, is what is at stake when members of a particular group speak of the menace to "Our way of life" presented by the Other. The uniting and all-encompassing power of Islam is threatened when, for example, the Muslim is panicked because of the growing presence of the West on Muslim lands. In circular fashion, the Salaf gains credibility for his cause even among average Muslims the more prevalent the Western presence in the Muslim World.

Indeed, as Western capitalism attempts to expand its markets further into the Muslim world, it gobbles up that world, assimilating and simplifying it in order that it might understand it better. So, through a process of flattening, compressing and rolling out in a systematic, simplified way those who will become its consumers, Western capitalism reconfigures, packages, sells and then re-presents Islam as just another way of being. The power of Islamic faith is rendered completely innocuous in the process. The average Muslim loses ground. He becomes foreign to himself, unrecognizable and a stranger in his own land.

The "fundamentalism" of the Salaf, then, is a simple reaction to "the loss of roots," the result of capitalism's deterritorialization, which, according to Žižek "undermines every

fixed social identity," such as the status of the believing Muslim. The recourse to Salafism, like to that of nationalism, emerges in order to protect the group from the traumatic disorientation of the processes of globalization, from the loss of ground caused by the disintegration of the really existing ummah.[23](#)

III. The Case for Egypt and the Muslim Brotherhood

I focus specifically on Egypt because of its unique status in the Muslim world and its singular relationship with the West. I concentrate roughly on the time period of Egypt's occupation by the British in the late-nineteenth century up through the full tenure of Gamal Abd Al-Nasser's presidency (a period spanning roughly 100 years from 1882 to 1970). This period of Egyptian history is especially marked for its heightened religious and cultural tensions. On the one hand, there was the state and Egypt's elite class, both of which sought even after independence (and continue to seek) to emulate and appease the West. On other hand was the Egyptian populace made up largely of the peasant and service classes. Where the elite classes often benefited from British colonialism directly through administrative and legal appointments, business investments and financial backing; or indirectly, as the middle-men who sold British manufactured goods in native shops and groceries, the populace was physically brutalized, financially deprived and psychically alienated from the Westernized state. The populace would form the core of the emerging Salafi movement.

I focus on the Muslim Brotherhood because it was one of the first Salafi groups to articulate the latent Muslim anxieties about the West, setting the trend for other Salafi movements in both Egypt and other parts of the Muslim world.[24](#) In other words, the Muslim Brotherhood is important for its demonstration effect, since their activities were often well-publicized all over the Arab world.

The Muslim Brotherhood is also unique for its response to colonial "shocks." Unlike the nationalists, who fought colonialism by highlighting the dynamism of contemporary indigenous culture, or the Communists, who sought to liberate Egypt through the obliteration of capitalism there, the Muslim Brothers responded to the same shocks in a purely imaginative way. By invoking the memory (both actual and imagined) of Islam's Golden Age, when *Muslims* were the growing superpower, the Muslim Brothers transferred the field of battle from the physical realm to the fields of the psychological and the imaginary.[25](#)

In other words, though the Muslim Brotherhood based their socio-political project on the historic seventh-century model of the first Islamic state, the Salafi project depended on an hyperextension of remembered history and a basic optimism about the future that justifies its imagined "utopic" designation. Egypt's Islamic narrative would be set aright through a continued fidelity to an imagined period of "true Islam."

IV. The Safety of an Imagined Past

In [re]constructing a Golden Age of Islam, Salafism embarks on an imaginative project to create an intangible, mythical past in its midst. In doing so, Salafis invent what they do not know, improvise what they do but what no longer exists and demarcate what in the present fits into this imaginative landscape of true Islam. What makes this project utopian is the form it takes in the Salafi imagination, for this Golden Age, like Utopia, is "a representational meditation on radical difference, radical otherness, and on the systemic nature of the social totality."²⁶ Indeed, because this vision of a recreated Golden Age of Islam in the present relies as much on an identity with the present as it does with memories of the past, the politics of this Golden Age lies, like that of political utopianism, in the "dialectic of identity and difference."²⁷ Indeed, much of the material from which this new utopian social order will emerge already exists in the form of the living Muslim ummah.

Crucial to any understanding of Islam is the role of history in the constitution of the Muslim ummah and of Islam itself. Islam initially defined itself negatively. The first Muslims believed that Islam followed in the tradition of the Jews and Christians but was not in line with either one of those religions. Rather, though the advent of Islam historically followed that of both Judaism and Christianity, Islam locates its source in a period earlier than either of its parent religions. Indeed, by its own profession, Islam began with Adam, with Adam being designated the first Prophet of Islam. By claiming Adam as their own, the first Muslims were therefore able to distinguish their religion from either of the two other dominant monotheistic faiths by asserting Islam's authenticity, its adherence to the truth that prevailed "at the beginning of things," against the corruption of Judaism and Christianity. According to orthodox Islamic faith, Islam, Judaism and Christianity are one in the same, all descended from the same God and brought to man via the same prophets. The differences that arose between the three religions were the result of innovations made along the way, cultural accretions and corruption. Islam therefore represented a return to the "true" religion of God because of its fidelity to the past, the final corrective in the history of man.

This emphasis on purity is important for two reasons: time posited further back approaches a moment without time -- the very beginning of things, as mentioned above. By locating contemporary Islam as it is understood today as the preservation of a moment of eternity then necessarily posits the authenticity of its teachings. In other words, orthodox Islamic faith holds that Islam -- via the Quran and the practices of the Prophet and his early companions -- is the unchanged word of God as revealed to man upon his creation. The second reason this is important is for its placement of Islam in relation to Judaism and Christianity; in other words, this logic posits Judaism and Christianity could exist as corruptions of Islam, deviations from the initial message preserved only in Islam. Indeed, it is this purity that is regarded by Muslims as the miracle of the Quran, which, in tautological fashion, itself carries the message of Islam's authenticity.

In most cases, the Quran itself, despite its material reality, occupies an important imaginative space not just in the mind of the Salaf, but, more importantly, the general

imagination of the Muslim ummah as a whole.²⁸ The Quran fulfills the role of the memory trace because it provides the vital link between the origin of things -- God and the creation of Man -- the Golden Age of Islam in seventh-century Arabia, the present and the future Salafi Utopia. In its divine timelessness (again, something that can only exist in the realm of the imaginary), the Quran not only provides in concrete detail and description direct representation of Islamic Utopia, it also provides the blueprint for the resurrection of that Utopia through its teachings and legal inscriptions.

The Quran's inviolability as divine speech in the imagination of the Muslim ummah precludes the possibility that it was altered or is alterable.²⁹ The past, specifically those moments of Quranic revelation, assumes a character of mythical purity that the Muslim is continually trying to recapture in his daily life through orthodox Islamic practice. Revising the past, rewriting the Quran or reinterpreting its verses in the light of the present represents an unforgivable rupture with the past in the Muslim imagination because it is a potential source for dissent and, therefore, disunity in the Muslim ummah. Any rethinking of the Quran or the orthodox historical narrative of Islam's development is thus deemed *bid'a*, an act of innovation forbidden by Islamic tradition. Indeed, this is because, according to Barlas, "Muslims continue to believe that communal harmony and unity depend on a set of events and choices that have long been overtaken by time and that . . . discourage new readings of the Quran."³⁰

This last point becomes all the more important when we consider that Quran is a fundamental instrument of transmission of the Muslim's past -- indeed of a time without time. Thus, the unique value of the Quran, like the memory trace, lies in its function as a "message from the future . . . but transmitted in the past."³¹ The Quran has thus become a passion for the Salaf: the Quran represents an important element in the vision of the future Salafi Utopia. It is a textual embodiment of a moment of perfection. Any tampering with the Quran will therefore profoundly affect the present as well as the potential for recasting the past in the future Salafi Utopia.

V. The Emergence of the Salaf

Muslim longing for the past became even more crucial to Muslim identity after the Balkanization of the Middle East and its subsequent psychic splitting. In the wake of colonialism and the dawning of globalization, memory has become an obsession in the Muslim psyche, a defense mechanism against the rapid changes of the last century. Such changes account not only for the emergence of the Salaf as a figure in history, but also for the Salaf's increasing popularity in the Muslim world. In other words, the Salaf and his Utopia are both products of history, the unintended consequences of colonialism and its baby, globalization.

The Salafi movement was initially defined according to a distinctly negative drive at its early stage: the Salaf was largely motivated by a desire not to let Westernized cultural practices interfere in the social and cultural affairs of the Muslim ummah, thereby possibly corrupting Muslim identity and unity. The teachings of the Muslim Brothers rely not only on an act of conscious memory but also on imagination. Because memory of

Islam's early time period is not readily accessible, it is through the imagination, then, that the Salaf constitutes himself. The Brotherhood taught the literal interpretation of the Quran and the return to what many in the West may consider rather medieval practices (i.e., the practices that were prevalent during the time of the Prophet in seventh-century Arabia, including the practice of *nushuz*,³² strict gender segregation and distinct gender roles; severe punishments for religious heresy and/or marital infidelity, including public lashings and executions, sometimes in the form of beheadings; and, most notably, for the literal interpretation for the call to jihad, or military Holy War.

According to Jameson, the utopic vision often happens as a defense against change, the violence of history. For the Salaf, who embodies an Islamic utopic vision, the changes he reacts against are the products of Western meddling in the Muslim World. The Salaf himself as well as the Utopia he envisions are, as Jameson argues about Thomas More's utopic vision, as much a product of history as they are the products of the Salaf's imaginative faculty. In other words, More's *Utopia* emerged when and how it did precisely because it was set against a backdrop of change and closure that completely upset the traditional way of life:

The surviving institution of the monastery may be said to play something of the role in More's imagination of Utopia that the institution of the traditional common lands -- the *mir* in Russia, the *ejido* in Mexico -- played in nineteenth-century socialist thinking. . . . Nor is it without significance that both these social realities -- the Inca empire and the monastic compound -- are in the process of wholesale dissolution in More's own time: the former by way of the Spanish conquest, the latter by way of Henry VIII's reforms. We can see, in the impact of globalization in our own period, the historical processes in which older institutions and cultures are tangibly being destroyed before our own eyes tend to arouse very special kinds of political passions and indignations. . . .³³

Similarly in the case of the Salafi Muslim Brotherhood, the Westernization of Egypt completely upset the traditions of Egypt's common populace. Indeed, today's Salaf is often from a rural or small-town background and has been raised according to traditional Islamic values. With the advent of Western colonialism and, most recently, globalization and Western military interventions in the Muslim world, the Salaf finds himself living in a complicated cosmopolitan world to which he cannot relate and with which he cannot cope.³⁴ He is therefore often driven to the past -- Islam's Golden Age, the Salafi Utopia -- to recoup a sense of subjective unity.

Hassan al-Banna, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, was the perfect embodiment of the Salaf. Highly intelligent and from a rural community, al-Banna was inspired to create the movement after moving to Cairo from his traditional, rural home in Ismailia and encountering what he viewed was the Western corruption of Egypt. In Cairo al-Banna saw first-hand what he would come to view as British attempts to recreate Egypt in its own mold. He was exposed to the abuses of the British soldier for the first

time and was astounded to find that even street signs were in "the language of [colonial] domination."[35](#)

Even more, al-Banna was dismayed to witness the daily humiliation and oppression that Egyptians were being subjected to by the British. He was "appalled to see the contrast between the luxurious villas of the foreigners and the 'miserable' homes of the Egyptians." Al-Banna founded the Brotherhood with the primary motivation of ridding Egypt of its British occupiers and attracted many early members with this promise. Indeed, the first members of the Brotherhood were six men who worked in a British camp. By the time al-Banna began preaching in Cairo, men like these early followers were "weary of this life of humiliation and restriction [under British colonialism] . . . [of seeing] that the Arabs and Muslims have no status . . . and no dignity. . . . They [Muslims] are not more than mere hirelings belonging to foreigners."[36](#)

According to Leila Ahmed, crucial to the British project in Egypt was the exploitation of Egyptian natural resources, labor and of Egyptian consumers: "British interests lay in Egypt's continuing to serve as supplier of raw materials for British factories." Any reforms inaugurated by the British that benefited Egyptians were incidental: "the agricultural projects and administrative reforms pursued by the British administration were those designed to make [Egypt] a more efficient producer of raw materials [for British manufacturing industries]."[37](#) This policy necessarily left out those who mined, farmed, picked, packaged and shipped these materials out of Egypt.

Yet, it was not so much the violence of occupation and the physical and financial exploitation that necessarily accompanied it, but rather the Western-imported ideas and institutions, secularism in particular, which were regarded as the most dangerous challenges to Islam in Egypt. According to Fauzi M. Najjar, "compared to the Westernization in the modern age, the Crusades were less threatening, because they [the Crusaders] had brought nothing that was attractive to Muslims."[38](#) After the colonial encounter, however, the situation became quite different. The battle field had been shifted from the realms of the physical and material to the realms of the psychological and the imaginative. Many Egyptians were attracted to the ideas and innovations of the West and began to mimic them. Even the notion of the secular state, a total anathema to Islam, became the model for Egypt after independence.[39](#) Such challenges represented the greatest threat to early members of the Brotherhood.

Indeed, while the values of the West appealed to Egypt's leaders, the same ideas and values created an identity crisis for the populace. Al-Banna expressed his shock at the sense of social alienation resulting from the Western presence in Cairo:

Young men were lost, and the educated were in a state of doubt and confusion. . . . I saw that the social life of the beloved Egyptian nation was oscillating between her dear and precious Islamism which she had inherited, defended, lived with and become accustomed to, and made powerful during thirteen centuries, and this severe western invasion which is armed and equipped with all destructive and degenerative influences of

money, wealth, prestige, ostentation, material enjoyment, power and means of propaganda.[40](#)

Clearly, a mood of national depression had set in. The sense of apprehension and excitement that preceded the War was followed by a dark mood among the general populace. It had become clear that Egypt would remain within the sphere of Western influence with or without formal independence. Al-Banna attributed all of the problems that Egypt faced to the Western presence, specifically its worldliness and secularism. It appeared to the Brethren that God had abandoned Egypt because Egypt had abandoned God.[41](#)

VI. Construction of Salafi Utopia. Part One: Jihad

"His most important ally is American foreign policy."

-- Michael Scheurer, former chief of the CIA'S bin Laden Unit, in response to Osama Bin Laden's April 2006 audiotape calling for jihad against the West[42](#)

Since violence has become the measure of superpower efficacy, especially in the Muslim world, the call to jihad has become more pronounced among Islamists. This imperative to jihad is grounded in Islam itself. According to Karen Armstrong, the founders of Islam made it imperative on all Muslims to engage in continued struggle -- both spiritual as well as physical -- first, to defend Islam and Muslims against aggression and, second, to make the world accept the divine message of Islam, a longer project that would make the first need for jihad obsolete. The notion of jihad, then, was developed not only to protect the existing ummah of believers, but also to extend the rule of Islam into other parts of the world where Islam had not been introduced. Salafi projects therefore rely on memories of Islam's early battles in order to fight contemporary wars and reinvoke questions of survival and oneness in order to posit grounds for jihad against innocents.[43](#)

According to Jameson, Utopia emerges as a response to attack of some kind -- be it ideological, financial or physical -- and therefore represents a radical break from the prevailing forms or ways of life. The desire for Utopia is a decision to abandon the prevailing ways of life, so that first and foremost Utopia is characterized by an initial state of disruption and breakdown. For Jameson, "[the] Utopian form itself is the answer to the universal, ideological conviction that no alternative is possible. But it asserts this by forcing us to think the break itself, and not by offering a more traditional picture of what things will be like after the break."[44](#) This desire for breakdown of Western hegemonic globalization and cultural encroachment into the Muslim world constitutes the first step in the creation of a Salafi Utopia.

Indeed, though it is difficult at this point to determine what exactly the Salafi Utopia will look like aside from incorporating the practices of the early Muslims, all

investigations suggest that it will be preceded by a period of slate-cleaning fighting or disruption. According to Nedoroscik, the Muslim Brotherhood established the precedent for the kind underground guerrilla action now characterized as "terrorism" by the West. As early as the 1930s the Muslim Brotherhood had an underground paramilitary group and, by the 1940s were carrying out major violent activities aimed against British outposts as well as the Arab governments that were sympathetic to the West. Though these attacks did not take place on the conventional battlefield, they were widely regarded as defensive measures against an enemy whose physical presence had become more ephemeral, but whose ideological and psychological attacks had become more pernicious.

Similarly, in reaction to the growing Zionist movement in Palestine, the Muslim Brothers also began attacking Jewish businesses and government officials in Egypt. Their tactics, which included simultaneous attacks, and the use of guns and explosives to target specific venues and to assassinate key individuals, influenced the kind of actions Hamas, Hezbollah and Al-Qaeda use today.⁴⁵ As in the case of the British presence -- both real and imagined -- in Egypt, these attacks against Jewish elements were perceived by both its perpetrators and the larger Egyptian populace as defensive measures against an offensive, Western-backed political movement in Palestine.

Leading this call to jihad was Sayyid Qutb, a prominent member of the Brotherhood, who wrote:

The Koran makes it clear that obedience to human laws and judgments is a sort of worship, and anyone who does this is out of the *din* [religion], because he or she is taking some men as lords over others, whereas the *din* seeks to annihilate such practices, declaring that all men and women should be free of servitude to anyone other than Allah. When they have no such freedom, then it becomes incumbent upon Muslims to launch a struggle. . . . After annihilating the tyrannical force, whether political or racial tyranny, or domination of one class over the other within the same race, Islam establishes a new social, economic and political system, in which all men and women enjoy real freedom.⁴⁶

Qutb's reference to the Quran provides the link between contemporary Salafi struggles and those of the first Muslims. Indeed, part of the present Salafi struggle has already been played out in the past: the past battle against the pagan Arabs that paved the way for the rise of Islam's Golden Age in seventh-century Arabia is reinvoked in the present by Islam's battles against the West. In that first battle, the early Muslims ventured into the space of the imaginative in order to see themselves, first, as a community and, then, to create the necessary distinctions between themselves -- the believers--and their enemies, the pagans -- non-believers. The battle lines being drawn, Muslims found themselves a unified and victorious nation -- the kind Qutb envisioned recreating in order to surmount the growing Western threat.

Indeed, in their efforts to combat the remnants of the West in Egypt and other part of the Muslim world, the Muslim Brotherhood reinvoked the notion of jihad in the name of

oneness. They attracted followers by highlighting the divisive effect the West has had on the Muslim ummah.⁴⁷ At this time in Egypt's encounter with the West, Egyptian identity was in flux. Modernity was imposed from the outside and was widely perceived as yet another colonial project. The Muslim Brothers felt that these changes threatened the basic ideological foundations of their social sphere -- the imaginative distinctions that the Muslim relies on to posit his own identity against others. That the Muslim Brothers reached the height of their popularity just as the British were withdrawing from Egypt -- when the physical battle, as it were, had been won -- signifies the deep interiority of their struggle.⁴⁸

Though the West had been physically driven out of Egypt by the time of Nasser's presidency in 1956, the struggle of jihad continued and goes on still today. The Muslim Brothers felt that the West had lodged itself in the hearts and minds of the Egyptian people, the most remarkable example of which, paradoxically, was provided by Nasser himself. Despite his anti-Western stance, Nasser was a product of the secular revolution that had expelled the British in 1952 and that dated back to the secular Waft party.

The Brothers regarded Nasser's secularism as a betrayal of Islam; this was clear heresy since Islam by its very nature could not be separated from matters of the state. Indeed, unlike Christianity, Muslim scholars hold that Islam is not only a faith, but a source of law, a "Shar'ria that envisages a religio-political community (ummah) governed by God's rules."⁴⁹ Thus, the Muslim Brothers gained a following during this time not only by addressing the social and economic needs of the people, but also by addressing their psychological and spiritual need for unity.

Therefore, Western colonialism, the processes of globalization and, most recently, American military aggression, thus dramatically play into the hands of the Salaf: they represent useful material against which the past can be resurrected and the Salafi Utopia will be built. Most dramatically, Western colonialism and American military aggression have set up the field for the Salafi battle that will clear the ground for this new society. In positing its "Global War on Terror," the West occupies the position of the hostile and godless Arab pagan in the Muslim imagination. According to Jameson's definition of Utopia, then, the West and the processes of globalization thus represent the dilemma or source of social problems in the Muslim world against which the Utopian -- the Salaf -- "believes himself to hold the key."⁵⁰

VII. The Construction of Utopia. Part Two: Material Constructions on the Ground

*For Islamists, Islam is a "total project" incorporating all aspects of society.*⁵¹

Part of the Salafi project, then, is not destruction of current Western hegemonic culture in the Muslim world and beyond, but an actual reconstruction of the past in the present for the creation of a kind of utopian future. In this way, then, the Salaf, like the Utopian, straddles two separate set of moments alternately. He looks to the past to correct the present and yet uses the present to create a future based dramatically on the ethos of a mythical past. On the practical level, this means a dramatic rejection of the West

(embodied in the Muslim imagination in the processes of change, innovation and modernization) as a foreign element anomalous to the imaginative picture of true Islam.⁵² It also means an active effort to recreate on the level of the sociological, political and even the mundane the look and feel of the first Islamic state.

The Salafi vision of a resurrected Golden Age of Islam is total and all-encompassing. Jameson's reference to Bradley's theory of history establishes the systemic nature of the utopian construct. Bradley's theory can also be used to trace the source of the Salaf's problem, and therefore the need for a Salafi utopia: the perceived corruption of Islam and the consequent unraveling of the ummah's unifying roots. The reconstruction of a Golden Age of Islam will necessarily reunite the global Muslim ummah under one totalizing political empire:

Bradley's elegant formulation warns us of the self-defeating price to be paid for any thoroughgoing exercise in systematic thinking in history; and this, whether we have to do with a relatively contemporary (structural conception) of the synchronic (or of totality, or the mode of production, or the Foucauldian episteme), or simply (as in Bradley) of some *a/* state b progression, or indeed with some more general sense of the present as an immense of the whole. The theory of history has certainly moved in this direction: and it is as though the ever greater accumulation of facts about a given period (very much including our own) determines a gravitational shift from diachronic thinking (so-called linear history), to synchronic or systemic modeling.⁵³

In the Salafi imagination, a new Golden Age of Islam -- the Salafi Utopia -- would occupy both types of systems identified by Jameson through Bradley, but up until the point of actuality. In other words, the Muslim ummah should progress linearly towards (going back to the future) that Golden Age of Islam through perfected faith and perfected behavior. As a result, and with the grace and blessings of God, a utopic society will emerge, representing a veritable replacement of Western hegemonic power. Once this Utopia has been achieved, however, the ummah will exist in a state of synchrony in which the perfected model will simply perpetuate itself everywhere.

Indeed, according to Benjamin, this conception of simultaneity is marked in the real "not by prefiguring and fulfillment, but by temporal coincidence [that is] measured by clock and calendar."⁵⁴

Like the reverence for the past, a sense of communal simultaneity is also basic to Islamic confession. In the Muslim ummah, this takes the form of the Islamic calendar upon which Muslims mark the transition from year to year. Sulayman S. Nyang offers a useful explanation of the importance of the Islamic calendar in the Muslim world:

The Muslim lunar calendar is everywhere adopted with Islam, and tends to displace other systems of time-reckoning . . . the Arabic names for the Muslim months are adopted, although alternate local names based on an

earlier calendar may also be utilized, as well as direct vernacular translations expressive of the religious and social content of the month in question.[55](#)

According to this formulation, then, Muslims turn -- in dialectical fashion -- to the past in order to mark the present. They begin their history during that almost mythical age of the Prophet when he and his followers fled to Medina to escape their enemies in Mecca. This pilgrimage marks the first day of the Muslim calendar.

Additionally, this migration from Mecca to Medina has become a uniting moment for the Muslim ummah in the present. The Prophet's *hijra*[56](#) not only marks the first physical gathering of the early Muslims in their movement from Mecca to Medina, but it is replayed in the physical gathering of the world Muslim ummah today in the Hajj to Mecca.[57](#)

But perhaps the most visible marker of the widespread retreat to Islam's imagined past is the resurgence of the new Islamic veil. Where the traditional veil of turn-of-the-century Egypt served as a symbol of status and wealth, the new Islamic veil is grounded in Islam's history and is a tool of anti-Western resistance. This new veil therefore is a kind of material manifestation of the revival of Islam's foundational moments.

According to Daphne Grace the recent resurgence of the veil is crucial to an understanding of post-colonial Islamic fundamentalism because "The veil is central to the discourses of west versus east, democracy versus 'fundamentalist' Islam, and still remains an icon of the otherness of Islam."[58](#) In other words, in the Salafi imagination, "true Islam" can be diagnosed by two symptoms: jihad and internal cultural austerity -- especially in women's culture -- what in the Western idiom would be read as external "terrorism" and "internal cultural repression," respectively.[59](#)

The resurgence of the veil, a garment which was initially prescribed exclusively for the Prophet's wives (and so its growing observation by Muslim women presently as an effort to invoke the past, can, technically, be read as a deviation from the past) is perhaps the most ubiquitous manifestation of the Salafi project to recreate a mythic Golden Age of Islam in the present. With the advent of Islam, the veil was initially used for seclusion. The Arabic term *hijaba* or *hijab*, the name given to the veil commonly worn by Muslim women in urban Egypt today, was first used to mandate the seclusion of the Prophet's wives in a chapter of the Quran called the Verses of the Curtain: "If you ask [the Prophet's] wives for anything, Speak to them from behind a curtain [hijab]. This is more chaste for your hearts and their hearts."[60](#) The curtain which secluded the Prophet's wives from view has become the mobile curtain or veil of the twentieth-century.

According to Karen Armstrong, the Muslim Brothers specifically sought to model their lives on the Prophet's life in order to "approximate as closely as possible to [his] perfection"[61](#) and so establish the foundations of a new Egyptian polity based on the Prophet's model. The Muslim Brothers began to imitate the ways Muhammad "spoke, ate, loved, washed and worshipped so that in the smallest details of their li[ves]"[62](#) not simply

to purify themselves spiritually but also to give their members first-hand access to the process of remaking Egypt into a fully Islamicized society.

Women also rose to the Muslim Brotherhood's challenge. Instead of emulating the Prophet, however, Muslim Egyptian women sought to emulate the lives of his wives. This meant a return to seclusion in some instances, an active involvement in the life of the local mosque and, perhaps most conspicuously, a revival of the hijab. Women symbolically signaled their support of this turn to Salafi Islam through the new, distinctly Islamic veil.[63](#)

In her article entitled, "Gendered Resistance, Feminist Veiling, Islamic Feminism," Fadwa El-Guindi identifies a motivating Salafi trend in the recent resurgence of the veil or *hijab* among Egyptian women. El-Guindi suggests that the coincidental resurgence of the hijab in 1970s Egypt with the pinnacle of Salafism, a trend that continues today, reflects a cultural revolution in Egypt towards fundamental Islam:

It [the hijab] erupted everywhere in the main urban centers of Egypt, particularly in the universities, ultimately spreading outward. It was a grass-root, voluntary youth movement, possibly begun, by women, with mixed backgrounds, lifestyles and social boundaries . . . the voluntary wearing of the hijab since the mid-seventies is about liberation from imposed, imported identities, consumerist behaviors, and an increasingly materialist culture. Further, a principal aim has been to allow women greater access to Islamic literacy.[64](#)

According to El-Guindi, the widespread return to the veil signals Egyptian women's support for and participation in Salafi movements. The new veil thus provides the most noticeable marker of a widespread willingness to return to the early traditions of Islam. In other words, the new veil embodies Benjamin's theory of history's recuperative function by dramatically reenacting a prior moment in Islamic history.

VIII. The Outcome: The Growth of the Salafi Movement

We had to choose an enemy. So the Americans were the number one enemy. Particularly as the Americans became more and more involved. They didn't want to leave us alone. The U.S. were using this area as their own piece of land. If people were going to be angry with anybody, then they should be angry with the Americans. We have to get rid of them.

-- Khaled Al-Fauwaz

In his 1982 monograph, entitled *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition*, Fazlur Rahman recognizes the role of fear in the constitution of contemporary Muslim identity. Rahman identifies a "peculiar psychological complex" among Muslims after their contact with the West that often leads them to revere their past and their tradition "as if it were [their] God."[65](#) Indeed, according to another Islamic

scholar, Asma Barlas, this "may explain why many Muslims have begun to ignore 'the power of interpretation in the formation of historical meaning,'⁶⁶ a process in which 'imagination and representation [are] no less, if not more, important than . . . the "reality" of the past.'⁶⁷ In other words, Islam's imagined past, in its intangible liminal space, becomes more crucial to the Muslim for its fragility, for its always already existing under threat of memory loss or erasure.

Part of the appeal of Salafi movements in the Muslim World can be attributed to the role of imagination and memory in Islam generally. According to Barlas, author of [Muslim] tradition is not just "intertwined with history; it becomes its reincarnation."⁶⁸ That Salafism has reached such popularity across the Muslim World thus has very much to do with this role of memory and imagination in the constitution of the Muslim ummah itself -- which the Salafi brings to the fore.

So how things will turn out? The West's continued meddling in the affairs of the Muslim world will directly thwart -- through physical violence, economic deprivation or diplomatic coercion -- the Salaf's attempts to construct his Utopia. This, in turn, will only harden the Salaf's resolve. In other words, Islam's Golden Age will emerge more forcefully, for, according to Jameson, "this increasing inability to imagine a different future enhances rather than diminishes the appeal and also the function of Utopia."⁶⁹ In other words, the concerted global "war on terror" as well as the acceleration of globalization processes will only drive Salafism and its various follows to further extremes to achieve their goals.⁷⁰ In short, the Salafi movement will continue to grow.

This is reflected in contemporary geopolitics even as I write. Despite its popularly recognized and logistically legitimate election in January of 2006, Hamas, for example, has been diplomatically isolated and economically dispossessed by the West and its allies because of its fundamentalist Islamic agenda. It nevertheless enjoys considerable popularity among the Palestinian electorate. Some might argue that it is *because* of its isolation by the West that Hamas has won the hearts of the Palestinian people.

Along the same lines, in order for the US to pursue its hegemonic interests in Egypt, the largest Arab country, Egypt must remain non-democratic, the "underlying notion [of this program being], of course, that a democratic awakening could give rise to anti-American attitudes"⁷¹ and further propel Salafi movements. Indeed, even as it pushes its democratic agenda in Iraq and Afghanistan, the US continues to give nearly \$3 billion a year in economic and military aid to Egypt despite the Egyptian government's egregious election fraud, coercion of voters and unwarranted arrests of elected Muslim Brothers. The Egyptian government is experiencing an all-time low in popularity, as far as polls can tell.⁷²

But perhaps the perniciousness of this cycle of the attack against and subsequent resurgence of the Salaf is best exemplified in the Iraq War -- the American self-described Operation [for] Iraqi Freedom and the founding moment for Middle Eastern democracy. In fact, this "operation" has become the rallying cry for "terrorists," attracting Islamic fundamentalists and mujahadeen to the cause of an Islamic Iraq from Europe, Jordan,

Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan and Pakistan. Even more, Iraq's religious parties have been catapulted from the margins of a secular society to the forefront of Iraqi politics, with the Shiite bloc advancing, and winning, a Sharia'-based Islamic state. Already, the US is stepping in to prevent such a state from materializing.

All of this will ensure not only the Salaf's continued existence, but will also continue to fuel the flame beneath his fundamentalist agenda. Because the Salaf is actively excluded from any position of recognized leadership, the Salafi movement will never disappear into establishment, the ideological nature of its mythos never exposed for what it is.⁷³ Instead, the Salaf will remain alive and kicking in the margins, the martyr calling for Utopia in an unjust, disorienting world. The Salaf doesn't need proof for his cause. The world --the West -- proves his case for him.

Notes

¹ Sayings attributed to the Prophet Muhammad, often used as supplemental guidance to the Quran, Islam's official holy text.

² The early Muslims were called *salafs*. According to Huband, the term salaf, literally translating to mean *predecessor*, is one "whose acts and beliefs provided a model for later generations of Muslims. Later Muslims, inspired by the interpretive insights of these early Muslims, attempted to follow their example and developed a movement known as the Salafiyya school of thought" (xiv). The Salafiyya school of thought differs from other branches of Islamic thought in its conservative interpretation of Islam and unique desire to emulate, to the point of veritable recreation in the present, the lives of the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad, and his early followers. Indeed, since the first Muslims created an Islamic city-state, this attempt to return to the past necessarily mandates the creation of an Islamic polity, making the salaf, then, not merely a religious figure but also a political one. Therefore, for the purposes of this article, I will be using the terms Salaf (Salafi, adj.), fundamentalist and Islamist interchangeably, with the understanding that all have the characteristics Huband articulates as well as a militant, political edge.

I designate the Salaf male because, historically, those who follow the Salafiyya school of thought tend to be male. Though there are various reasons for this, which, for the sake of brevity, I will leave to another investigation, the Salaf make reference to is characterized in the following way: college-educated, bearded, young, male, from the lower or lower-middle classes, of rural or small-town background, high-achieving and intelligent and "attributes many of the decadent aspects of behavior in the Muslim World either to Western influence or the squandering of oil money, and they firmly believe that should 'true Islam' be implemented, the Muslim World would be independent, prosperous, just and righteous societies." See Saad Eddin Ibrahim. *The New Arab Social Order: A Study of the Social Impact of Oil Wealth*. Boulder: Westview, 1982, 23 for more on the characteristics of the "angry Muslim militant."

I refer to "Salafism" and "the Salafi movement" interchangeably to refer to the various Islamist movements past and present with the object of creating an Islamic state based on the first Muslim city-state. These groups are characterized by their political agenda as well as their religious conservatism. Though the various Salafi groups which fall under this category differ in their precise interpretations of traditional Islamic narratives of the past, they all subscribe to the notion that the recreation of a purely Islamic society -- what I am calling in this paper the Salafi Utopia -- will be a panacea for Muslims. In other words, according to Salafi narratives, the economic, diplomatic, military and social and cultural problems facing much of the Muslim World today are a consequence of a failure in those parts of the Muslim World to live up to Islamic law. This corruption of the Muslim spirit is perceived by the Salaf to be a direct result of Western economic coercion, military engagement and cultural encroachment into the Muslim World. By reinvoking that utopic moment in the history of Islam when Muslims had global hegemony and experienced the height of cultural and intellectual production, the Salaf is able to address all of the problems faced by Muslims in various parts of the world through a simple religious prescription. His argument, in essence, can be phrased as such: return to the Islam of the Prophet and his early companions and all injustice will disappear.

[3](#) Huband, Mark. *Warriors of the Prophet: The Struggle for Islam*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1999, 103.

[4](#) See Jameson, Fredric. *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*. London: Verso, 2005, 27 for discussions of the notion of Utopian defense against globalization and historical processes in which older institutions and cultural practices are being destroyed. See also page 87 for Jameson's reference to Bradley's definition of systemic thinking for my uses of Utopia in this paper.

[5](#) The Muslim ummah, which the Salaf would consider himself a part of in addition to the more exclusive community of Salafs, is generally referred to as the ummah or "community of believers." *Ummah* is an all-encompassing term that includes Muslims in all parts of the world and who practice all branches of Islam (Sunni, Shi'i, Sufi, etc.). I will subsequently refer to the community of Muslims as, simply, the ummah.

[6](#) Mernissi, Fatima. *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society*. Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1987, 18-19.

[7](#) Mernissi, Fatima. *Women's Rebellion and Islamic Memory*. London: Zed, 1996, 89.

[8](#) See Ahmed, Leila. *Women and Gender in Islam*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992, 102-123.

[9](#) Ibrahim, *The New Arab Social Order*, 22.

[10](#) According to Anthony Giddens, globalization can be defined as "the intensification of worldwide social relations which link localities in such a way that local happenings are

shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa" (63). Often, the exchange in social relations is an uneven one, with the countries in the West, specifically the US, representing a dominant influence on third-world countries and with third-world countries providing little if any influence on the wealthier, producer countries in the West.

One of the by-products of globalization is the "intensifying of more localized nationalist sentiments. . . . At the same time as social relations become laterally stretched and as part of the same process, we see the pressures for local autonomy and regional cultural identity" (64). For more on the processes of globalization see Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990, 63-66.

[11](#) According to Huband, when the rise of Islamist groups is viewed historically, "it was the West that politicized the entire debate by providing the Islamists -- as the colonial oppressor -- into whose superior way of life the orientalist find it difficult to comprehend Muslims not wanting to assimilate themselves." See Huband, *Warriors of the Prophet*, 104.

[12](#) According to Nedoroscik, the message of the Muslim Brotherhood was encapsulated in its slogan: "God is our purpose, the Prophet our leader, the Qu'ran our constitution, Jihad our way and Dying for God's cause our supreme objective" ("Extremist Groups in Egypt," 50). This slogan, I am arguing, functions like a script or code according to which the Salaf lives his life.

[13](#) Humphreys, R. Stephen. *Between Memory and Desire: The Middle East in a Troubled Age*. Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2000, 148.

[14](#) Freud qtd. in Jameson, *Marxism and Form*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971, 62.

[15](#) Zizek, Slavoj. *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel and Critique of Ideology*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1993, 216.

[16](#) Jameson, *Archaeologies*, 63.

[17](#) See Armstrong, Karen, *Muhammad: Biography of a Prophet*. New York: Harper Collins, 1993 for more an anti-Islamic propaganda.

[18](#) Zizek, *Tarrying with the Negative*, 216.

[19](#) Barlas, Asma. *"Believing Women" in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Quran*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002, 84.

[20](#) Barlas, *"Believing Women,"* 85

[21](#) Zizek, *Tarrying with the Negative*, 201.

[22](#) Zizek, *Tarrying with the Negative*, 201-202.

[23](#) Zizek, *Tarrying with the Negative*, 232.

[24](#) According to Huband, the Muslim Brotherhood was an all-encompassing organization with aims to address every aspect of the Muslim's life: "the brotherhood would have at its core a 'Salafiyya message, a Sunni way, a Sufi truth, a political organization, an athletic group, a cultural-educational union, an economic company and a social idea." The Salafiyya message, however, would, I will show, determine all other aspects of the organization's movement and action. In many ways, some could argue, the Salafiyya message makes the other columns of the Brotherhood's agenda necessary as Salafism is not merely a school of thought but a way of life.

[25](#) Ibrahim, Saad Eddin. *The New Arab Social Order: A Study of the Social Impact of Oil Wealth*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1982, 20-24.

[26](#) Jameson, *Archaeologies*, xii

[27](#) Jameson, *Archaeologies*, xii.

[28](#) Huband, *Warriors of the Prophet*, 104.

[29](#) Barlas, "*Believing Women*" in *Islam*, 36.

[30](#) Barlas, "*Believing Women*" in *Islam*, 41.

[31](#) Jameson, *Archaeologies*, 31.

[32](#) Quranic term referring to the practice of disciplining one's wife -- namely, by hitting -- when she disobeys her husband. In the Salafi revival, the figurative interpretation of the verses that calls for discipline were replaced by the literal interpretation, calling for physical violence on the person of the woman when she fails to meet/follow the demands of her husband. See Al-Saadawi, Nawal. *The Nawal Al-Saadawi Reader*. Wife beating or *nushuz* is predicated on Islamic gender ideology that conceives of men as the guardians of women and of women as the obedient wards of men. *Surat al-Nisa* verse 42 is used as a central hermeneutical point from which this ideology derives. The translation of the verse reads as follows:

Men are (qawwamun) the Protectors and maintainers of women, because God has given the one more strength than the other, and because they support them from their means. Therefore the righteous (salihat) women are devoutly obedient (qanitat), and guard in their husband's absence what God would have them guard.

[33](#) Jameson, *Archaeologies*, 27.

[34](#) Ibrahim, Saad Eddin. *The New Arab Social Order*, 20-23.

[35](#) Mitchell, Richard P. *The Society of the Muslim Brothers*. London: Oxford University Press, 1969. Qtd. in Ahmed, *Women and Gender*, 192.

[36](#) Ahmed, *Women and Gender*, 192.

[37](#) Ahmed, *Women and Gender*, 145.

[38](#) Najjar, "The debate on Islam and secularism," 5.

[39](#) The Muslim Brothers regarded Nasser's secularism as a betrayal of Islam; this was clear heresy since Islam by its very nature could not be separated from matters of the state. Indeed, unlike Christianity, Muslim scholars hold that Islam is not only a faith, but a source of law, a "Shar'ia that envisages a religio-political community (umma) governed by God's rules." Thus, the Muslim Brothers gained a following during this time then not only by addressing the social and economic needs of the people, but also by addressing their psychological and spiritual need for unity.

[40](#) Qtd. in Nedoroscik, "Extremist Groups in Egypt," 50.

[41](#) Ahmed, *Women and Gender*, 217.

[42](#) Slackman, Michael. "Bin Laden Says West is Waging War Against Islam." *New York Times* April 26, 2006. New York: New York Times Company.

[43](#) Baker, Raymond William. "Egypt in the Time and Space of Globalism." *Arab Studies Quarterly*. Summer 1999. Vol. 21. Issue 3, 4; and Armstrong, *Muhammad*, 260.

[44](#) Jameson, *Archaeologies*, 31.

[45](#) Nedoroscik, "Extremist Groups in Egypt," 49, 53-54.

[46](#) Qtd. in Nedoroscik, "Extremist Groups in Egypt," 50.

[47](#) Armstrong, *Muhammad*, 260.

[48](#) Keppel, 54

[49](#) Najjar, 5

[50](#) Jameson, *Archaeologies*, 11

[51](#) Huband, *Warriors of the Prophet*, 119.

[52](#) It should also be noted that the Muslim Brotherhood filled in where the government fell short and thus garnered the trust and approval of the people. I am arguing, however, that the Muslim Brotherhood filled more than just the physical and material needs of the people. Rather, groups like the Muslim Brotherhood were motivated by a desire for the past, a pure Muslim ummah from which the existing ummah had fallen. This took the form of political and cultural interventions to disrupt Westernized cultural and medical practices in Egypt, with the Muslim Brotherhood taking the social and cultural affairs of the country into their own hands. The successes they achieved in the political and social spheres, then, were used to reinforce their message about the supremacy of Islam over against the West as well as to signal the potential success of a future Islamic state.

[53](#) Jameson, *Archeologies*, 31.

[54](#) Benjamin, qtd. in Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities*. London: Verso, 1991, 24.

[55](#) I.W. Lewis, *Islam in Tropical Africa*. London: Oxford University Press, 1968. Qtd. in Sulayman 50.

[56](#) Arabic word meaning migration. The hijra of the Prophet and the first Muslims took place in 633 A.D. This date marks the beginning of the Muslim calendar, upon which the major events of the Islam are marked and practiced on the daily, monthly and yearly scale.

[57](#) The Hajj is the Muslim pilgrimage to the city of Mecca, which all Muslims -- men and women -- with sufficient resources are urged to perform once during their lifetime. The hajj itself consists of circumambulating the Kabaa in counterclockwise fashion, after which the pilgrims proceed to Mount Arafat and from there retreat to Muzalafah where they throw stones in a symbolic act of rejecting evil spirits.

The hajj itself -- down to the particulars just described -- date to the jahilliy period of Arab history. According to Karen Armstrong, the desert Arabs had built the Kabaa to house their pagan deities, the primary one being a deity called Al-lah. With the advent of Islam, the other pagan deities were removed from the Kabaa, leaving Al-lah the sole deity of Muslims. In order to maintain a degree of continuity with the traditions of the Arabs he was trying to bring into the Islamic fold, Muhammad maintained the pagan practice of the Hajj, making it a crucial feature of orthodox Islamic practice. See Armstrong, *A Short History of Islam* for further discussion of the foundation of Islam

[58](#) Grace, Daphne. *The Woman in the Muslim Mask: Veiling and Identity in Postcolonial Literature*. London: Pluto Press, 2004, 12.

[59](#) Grace, *The Woman in the Muslim Mask*, 12.

[60](#) *Holy Quran*. Trans. Arthur J. Arberry. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964, 33: 40.

[61](#) Armstrong, *Muhammad*, 262.

[62](#) Armstrong, *Muhammad*, 262.

[63](#) Ahmed, *Women and Gender*, 216-217.

[64](#) El-Guindi, Fadwa. "Gendered Resistance, Feminist Veiling, Islamic Feminism." *The Afhad Journal*. Summer 2005, Vol. 22 Issue 1, 53.

[65](#) Rahman, Fazlur. *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982 147.

[66](#) Spellberg qtd. in Barlas, "*Believing Women*" in *Islam*, 88.

[67](#) Barlas, "*Believing Women*" in *Islam*, 88.

[68](#) Barlas, "*Believing Women*" in *Islam*, 88.

[69](#) Jameson, *Archaeologies*, 232.

[70](#) See Zizek. *Tarrying with the Negative*, 232 for further discussion of fundamentalist movements, both religious and ethnic.

[71](#) See Zizek, Slavoj. *Revolution at the Gates: Zizek on Lenin, The 1917 Writings*. London: Verso, 2002, for more on the Muslim fundamentalist connection to the West.

[72](#) See Baker, Raymond William. "Egypt in the Time and Space of Globalism," *Arab Studies Quarterly* Summer 1999. Vol. 21, Issue 3, for more on Egypt's relationship with the West, specifically the US.

[73](#) See Zizek, *Tarrying with the Negative*, 228.

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