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4. Iranian President Ahmedinejad wrote an eighteen page letter to George Bush in the wake of Iran's uranium enrichment crisis. But the letter created debates relating to Israel's existence, and civilisational conflict. The link to the complete text of the letter in English is available at www.littlegreenfootballs.com/weblog/?entry=20462_Ahmadinejad (accessed on 12 May 2006).

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Islam and the Concept of the Secular

Malcolm D. Brown

For any concept of the secular to exist (including secularisation, secularism, laicism and equivalents in other languages), there must be a distinction between religious and non-religious spheres of life, society, or the world. Durkheim regarded this distinction between the sacred and the profane (as well as religious community) as an essential element in the definition of religion (Durkheim 1995: 38, 44), but it is also an essential element in the definition of the secular. If the secular is indistinct from the religious, we cannot usefully say that there is such a thing as the secular, nor that there has been a shift from the religious to the secular, nor that there should be such a shift. A further point, which may lead us to qualify Durkheim's definition, is that religions do not always separate the sacred and the profane. Consider political theologies, from liberation theology at one end of the spectrum to theocracy at the other, which attempt to subsume the profane under the sacred. It has often been argued that such a subsumption is an essential characteristic of Islam, and the purpose of this paper is to investigate the extent to which this is the case.

Perhaps the lesson to be drawn from Durkheim's definition is that sociologists are mistaken in trying to define religion too precisely. Yet, as long as the sociology of religion has existed as a distinctive sub-discipline—and indeed before, in the work of Tönnies and Troeltsch—there has been disagreement about how religion should be defined. I am not the judge of how productive, or unproductive, this disagreement has been, and it is certainly not my wish in this paper to prolong it any further. Nevertheless, I would like to offer a brief reflection about the use of the word 'religion' to denote a category that includes Islam.

Trying to look at this from (something approaching) an 'insider' perspective, we must recall that the Arabic language is particularly important to Islam (indeed, it can be referred to as a sacred language), and that the word 'religion' does not derive from Arabic, or any other language native to the heartlands of Islam. The closest equivalent in Arabic is the word *din*, used in the Qur'an, and it is worth taking a moment to consider in detail what this word means. Wilfred Cantwell Smith writes:

... the Arabic language has, and has had since the appearance of Islam and indeed from shortly before, a term and concept that seem to be quite closely equivalent to the Western 'religion'. Indeed this word—namely, *din*—is used in all the various senses of its Western counterpart. It carried the sense of personal religion: the classical dictionaries give *wara*, 'piety' as an equivalent, a word that never has a systematic or community meaning and that cannot have a plural. It carries also, however, the sense of a particular religious system, one 'religion' as distinct from another. In this sense it has a plural (*adyan*). This plural is not in the Qur'an, but is traditional. Furthermore, the word in its systematic sense can be used both ideally and objectively, of one's own religion and of other people's, the true religion and false ones (Smith 1978: 81).

To translate this into more everyday English, there is a tension between *din* as religion, and *din* as a religion. There was an early use of the collective term to denote one's own religion and the religion of 'outsiders', though this is not in the Qur'an. In Europe, such a collective use of the Latin *religio* came about after the Renaissance and Reformation, prior to which other religions were regarded as 'sects' or 'heresies' (Ibid: 83). However, *religio* came to imply a distinction between a secular and a religious sphere, but *din* did not have this connotation (Ibid: 92). In fact, *din* had three meanings in the Arabian peninsula of the seventh century: (i) the concept of systematic religion; (ii) the act of 'judging' or 'passing sentence', and, by extension, 'judgement' or 'verdict'; and (iii) the verbal noun of the verb 'to conduct oneself, to behave, to observe certain practices, to follow traditional usage, to conform', and therefore 'conformity, propriety, obedience' and 'usages, customs, standard behaviour', a noun that could only exist in the singular form (Ibid: 101-02). These meanings combine within the one concept what modern Westerners have separated into religious and secular concepts. So, does this mean that such a separation is incompatible with Islam?

There are two sides to this question—positive and negative—and this paper now looks at each in turn.

The Islamic Exception

In arguing that Islam is necessarily incompatible with the concept of the secular, Muslim thinkers and Western scholars of Islam have given two main reasons, to which I shall add a third reason that draws on general sociological thought, particularly the sociology of religion. Firstly, Islam is in some sense 'immune' to the concept of the secular, and its separation from the religious. Secondly,

the secular is a specifically Christian concept, and therefore irrelevant to Islam. Thirdly, secularisation and the concept of the secular is part of a modern Western history of industrialisation, and also irrelevant to the Muslim world.

'Immunity'

The 'immunity' argument states that there is no distinction between the religious and the secular in Islam. The first *shahada*, the very nucleus of Islam, witnesses that there is no God but *Allah* (The God), so God is necessarily sovereign over everything in the universe, from the courses taken by the stars and planets, to the political systems of the world, to the correct postures that human beings should assume in prayer. There are no exceptions to this sovereignty, indeed, no exceptions to this sovereignty are even hypothetically possible, so there is no distinction between the religious and the secular. Everything is under the sovereignty of God.

Now, this is merely my own commentary on the first *shahada*, but it reflects an orthodox Islamic understanding that is familiar to many Muslims. It will also be familiar to many Christian thinkers, especially in the Calvinist tradition. Granted, Christian thinkers have often argued that everything *ought to be* under God's sovereignty, whereas the principle of the first *shahada* is that everything *is* under God's sovereignty. Yet even this is by no means unique to Islam, but can be found in many religious traditions, including Christianity. So, what is special about Islam in this respect?

The answer to this question lies in the development of *shariah* (Islamic law), in which the sovereignty of God is put into practice, in which Islam is a total system encompassing *din* (religion, in the sense expounded above), *dunya* (way of life), and *dawla* (government, state, political system). Islamic law, based on the Qur'an and Hadith or *sunnah*, interpreted in various ways including the principle of abrogation (*naskh*), the consensus (*ijma'*) of the religious scholars (*ulema*), the customs (*'urf*) of the Muslim community, and systems of Islamic jurisprudence (*madhahib*), is seen as applicable to every aspect of life. Fred Halliday (2003: 58) puts this more strongly when he asserts that "in all its forms Islam claims to be able to legislate for the whole of human activity."¹ Let us take as an example the question of whether, if you are wearing two pairs of socks, should you remove one pair before praying? As far as I am aware, there is nothing in any form of Christianity that expresses a view on this subject, but there is a body of *shariah* that can be invoked on this very question. Granted, there are three conflicting answers to the question (one jurist says you must remove one pair of socks; another says it is recommended,

but not obligatory, to remove one pair; and still another that there is nothing wrong with wearing both pairs of socks), but, for the Muslim, it is possible and even appropriate to act in line with the principles of Islam in such a situation. It is not a merely 'secular' concern, but part of the *din wa dunya* of Islam. Similarly, the *shariah* contains principles about the application of taxation in an Islamic state, so neither is this something that can be decided with reference to purely 'secular' concerns. It is part of the *din wa dawla* of Islam. The secular is in effect squeezed out, by Islamic theology and *shariah*.

The Secular as a Christian concept

The second argument for the incompatibility of Islam with a religious/secular dichotomy is that the secular is a specifically Christian concept. The biblical text that has been cited in this regard is from the Synoptic Gospels (Mark 12:13-17, Matthew 22:15-22, Luke 20:20-6), where Jesus Christ is recorded as telling his listeners to render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's, and render unto God that which is God's. By implication, some things belong to Caesar and other things belong to God. That which belongs to God does not belong to Caesar, and that which belongs to Caesar does not belong to God. Therefore, there are things that do not belong to God, and God's sovereignty is limited to a religious sphere, which is distinct from a secular sphere. It is pertinent that this is taken from the Synoptic Gospels, which are among the earliest foundational texts of Christianity that are still in existence.

This is not an interpretation that would be supported by many biblical exegetes, theologians,² or, I suspect, many Christians, but it does give a basis to a Muslim perspective of Christianity. It is further supported by, for example, the 'two kingdoms' principle of some Protestant Reformers, or by Bonhoeffer's reflections on a 'secular Christianity' in a 'world come of age'. The Muslim may deduce that the separation of religious and secular spheres is a principle of Christianity, and one that is radically different from Islam, or, at least, that secularisation is a logical consequence of Christianity. *À la limite*, some Muslims may deduce that everything Western is Christian, including the most irreligious aspects of Western cultures. This may not be a logical deduction, but Muslim informants in my ethnographic research³ have told me that all three of the above views of Christianity actually are held by some Muslims today. Perhaps, when we consider the gross inaccuracies that pervade Western images of Islam, it is not surprising that some Muslims have misunderstood the nature of Christianity, and of Western society.

A Product of Western History, Modernity and Industrialisation

In a sense, this justification for the incompatibility of Islam with a religious/secular dichotomy is that the concept of the secular is specific to Western Christianity from the biblical narrative to industrialisation. Ziauddin Sardar (2003: 164) contends that secularism "is a product of the Augustinian and rationalist interpretations of Christianity," an argument that posits a link between secularism and Christianity while also rendering the origins of secularism more specific than Christianity *per se* and thus breaking the causal link between the two. There is nothing particularly 'biblical' or 'Christian' about industrialisation, but Weber's (1930) Protestant Ethic thesis suggested that there were some 'elective affinities' between the two, and industrialisation almost certainly began in a part of the world that had been influenced by two strands of Christianity (Roman Catholicism and Protestantism).

Some theories of secularisation—notably within the tradition represented most ably by Bryan Wilson (1966, 1982) and Steve Bruce (1996, 2002)—state or imply that secularisation is a consequence of industrialisation, and of certain events in Western European history, such as the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. If this is the case, it gives further reason to hypothesise that secularisation has not applied to Muslim societies, at least until industrialisation affected many Muslim societies in the twentieth century (for example, the oil industry). Of course, this does not logically exclude the concept of the secular from Muslim societies (because a concept of the secular is not logically dependent on secularisation), but it does seem likely that the two would exist side by side. Consequently, secularisation is a specifically Western concept, not one that is relevant to the Muslim world.

This deduction has the virtue of constituting a critique of assumptions that are Eurocentric and evolutionist, which conflate secularisation, modernisation and the Western route to modernity. In contrast, the relationship in the Muslim world between secularisation and industrialisation, or modern, formally 'democratic' politics, has often been different from the West. For example, the Iranian revolution came about when industrialisation and modernisation had reached a certain level, though it was also a reaction against the totalitarian elements and secularisation of the Pahlavi regime. Furthermore, as Olivier Roy (1997: 2) has suggested, it has often been the Islamic parties in the Muslim world that are the more democratic, and secular parties of government that are the more undemocratic. This is rarely recognised by Western foreign policy makers or in Western media discourses. For example, the banning of the Islamic party (*Refah*) in Turkey and the annulling of elections that the Islamic opposition (*Front Islamique du Salut*) in Algeria were about to win were both supported by

Western governments and media, while criticism of these undemocratic actions of secular government institutions was muted.

The Secular in Muslim Societies

Having outlined some arguments for the proposition that Islam is incompatible with a religious/secular dichotomy, I now outline the opposing case. In this section, I emphasise two contrasting principles. The first is that Muslim society, like all societies, is subject to external influences, and that these become constitutive of Muslim society and, in a sense, part of Muslim society. In anthropological terms, this is the principle of diffusion (associated, in classical anthropological theory, with the statistician Francis Galton), and it is argued that the concept of the secular is one that has diffused. The second principle emphasises that change exists as an internal dynamic, and that the concept of the secular in Muslim societies is based on pre-existing principles that can justifiably be referred to as Islamic. The idea of the nation is then used as an example.

Diffusion

No society or culture exists in isolation, but they borrow from each other, and frequently keep what they have borrowed. Thus, even if the concept of the secular was originally a Christian concept, or a modern Western concept, this does not mean that it is illegitimate in a Muslim society (any more than the use of the number zero, for example, is illegitimate in a Western culture). This may seem relatively uncontroversial, but its application to Islam has raised some profound questions about the nature of Western scholarship, as Edward Said and others have shown. Clifford Geertz (1993: 170) writes:

Religion tends to be viewed either as a rigidly archaic obstacle to needed progress or a beleaguered conservator of precious cultural values threatened by the corrosive powers of rapid change. Little attention is paid to religious development in and of itself, to regularities of transformation which occur in the ritual and belief systems of societies undergoing comprehensive social revolutions. Our view of religions as such is oddly static. We expect them to prosper or decline; we do not expect them to change.

In the case of Islam, this expectation of stasis has been even more marked. Said (1995) defined Orientalism in terms of a supposition that the Orient (including Islam) was different from, incompatible with, and inferior to the West, and that it was homogeneous and unchanging.⁴ So, the Orient was

regarded as incapable of incorporating or learning anything from the West, and, of course, it was regarded as unnecessary for the West to learn or absorb anything from the Orient. Said does not suggest that everything good about the West came from the Orient, or *vice versa*, but he also rejects a rigid distinction between the West and the Orient. Thus, he states:

... the notion that there are geographical spaces with indigenous, radically 'different' inhabitants who can be defined on the basis of some religion, culture, or racial essence proper to that geographical sphere is ... a highly debatable idea (Said 1995: 322).

This is quite a measured comment from Said, but Aziz Al-Azmeh's reflection on the subject is much less compromising. It is not only the Orientalists who he criticises, but also Muslims ('fundamentalists' or 'neo-Afghanists') who perpetuate a discourse of cultural authenticity. He argues from a recognition of the diversity of Islam to a critique of an anti-historicism that is predicated on the stasis of Muslim society, and, by extension, the impossibility of cultural and conceptual diffusion:

Muslim reality ... is ... composed of many realities, some structural, some organizational and institutional, but which are overall highly fragmentary. Nevertheless, abstracted from its socio-economic bearings, European Islam, and Islam *tout court*, has been represented as a cohesive, homogeneous and invariant force, indeed an otherness so radical that it is possible to speak of it as a historical enemy, much in the same way as communism was addressed in some circles.... [There is] an objective complicity between the three sides that sustain the culturalist rhetoric: Western xenophobia, postmodernist xenophilia and xenophobic, retrograde nationalisms and para-nationalisms in Eastern Europe and countries of the South, in which I include political Islamism.... This is an objective complicity between exoticism and the rhetoric of identity and authenticity.... Authenticity is ... both past and future linked congenitally by the ontological void of today (Al-Azmeh 1996: 4, 28, 89).

For our purposes, a critique of the notion that cultural and conceptual diffusion are impossible must address the diffusion of the concept of the secular. And if this concept is not to be excluded, congenitally, into an ontological void, we must recognise that its diffusion is part of the history of Muslim societies, and, indeed, a part of an Islamic history that is conceived in anti-essentialist terms. Consequently, it is valid to point to *de facto* secularism in present-day Islamic thought, such as secularists for whom 'nothing impedes development

so much as the Shari'a, which they regard as "illogical, quirky, and backward," who "seize on the European idea of divorcing religion from public affairs and advocate this for the umma," but who "are pious believers who maintain the daily observances of Islam but withdraw the law from government affairs" and argue their position on the basis that the entire sacred law is contained in the Qur'an, rendering *shariah* an unnecessary addition (Pipes 2002: 120-1). If we understand Islam and secularism in diffusionist and anti-essentialist terms, we must recognise that such beliefs, although secular in certain respects, are unambiguously Islamic.

*Ummah and asabiyyah*⁵

The case against the incompatibility of Islam with a religious/secular dichotomy can be augmented with the following observation: there has been, in Islam, an internal distinction between the religious and the secular, or an analogous distinction, for centuries. I emphasise, this concept has been internal to Islam, not a foreign concept imposed from outside. There are a number of Islamic objections to theocracy, some of which explicitly support the existence of a secular state. The Ibn Khaldun Society's (1997: 23) founding document argues that the Qur'an is "a moral edifice rather than a code of laws," and certainly does not mandate a particular state polity. In this sense, any Muslim state should be, and indeed is, "a secular state, with the proviso that the term 'secular state' should not be understood in a negative sense." Other Islamic objections to theocracy include the corruption that it entails for the religious ruler and for the religion itself, the necessary infringement of the Qur'anic dictum of 'no compulsion in religion' (*Al Baqarah*, 2: 256), and the recasting of *iman* (faith) as *shariah* (law) (e.g. Kurzman 1998: 19). It has also been observed that a characterisation of a state as 'Islamic' often entails state supervision of the Islam that is preached from the pulpit; thus distinctions between orthodoxy and heresy are fundamentally exercises of state political power (Akbarzadeh and Saeed 2003: 8-10).

In this section, I focus on one example of the dynamic which creates an internal distinction between the religious and the secular, but before doing so, it should be noted that this internal concept of the secular has a broader basis, in the foundations of Islam and the *longue durée* of Muslim history. According to Mohammed Mouaqit (1984: iv-v), the ideological basis of secularisation and *laïcité* has proceeded from monotheism itself, *via* the following process:

L'islam, le christianisme (et le judaïsme également) ne séparent pas le temporel et le spirituel au stade de leur fondation. La monothéisation de la représentation, accomplie par ces religions, aboutit à un dualisme

qui a pour conséquence la défonctionnalisation sociale de leur système symbolique. Ce processus se manifeste de la façon suivante: par rapport aux représentations polythéistes, les religions monothéistes établissent autour de l'idée d'un Dieu unique un système de croyance qui repose non pas sur une fonction sociale directe, mais sur un rapport culturel fondé sur la foi; la théocentralisation de la représentation monothéiste s'accompagne d'une monopolisation du système symbolique, d'une identification du système de référence et d'une identification du sacré au spirituel (c'est en cela que réside la fonction idéologique du monothéisme); enfin, la représentation monothéiste inscrit la finalité humaine dans une méta-histoire. De ce fait, le temporel est rejeté vers le profane. En ce sens, il y a un processus idéologique de sécularisation et de laïcisation négatif, commun à toutes les religions monothéistes, parce que dû à la monothéisation même de la représentation.⁶

The example of the internal dynamic on which I have chosen to focus is taken from the *Muqaddimah* of Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406), the introduction to history and historiography, written in the 1370s.⁷ The reasons for focusing on this work include its importance in the history of Islamic thought, its apparent modernity (which has led to 'Islamocentrist' claims that Ibn Khaldun was the founder of modern social science, which have been dismissed for equally Eurocentric reasons), and because of its influence on late twentieth-century social-scientific work about Muslim societies, notably that of Ernest Gellner. More specifically, I want to focus on Ibn Khaldun's analysis of the concept of *asabiyyah*,⁸ then contrast it with an analysis of the concept of the *ummah*, suggesting throughout that there is an implicit distinction between a secular polity and a religious community in which the former is essential to the latter.

Ibn Khaldun's view of *asabiyyah* is summarised as follows by Erwin Rosenthal (1965: 18):

'*Asabiya* is a concept of Ibn Khaldun's that has aroused the opposition of modern orthodox Muslim thinkers, who regard it as contrary to Islam. In fact, he stresses its significance, saying it is needed for the success of prophecy and of *da'wa*.... Its foremost role, however, he assigns to the power-state, for '*asabiya* is a corporate feeling; a common bond, due in the first place to ties of blood and family tradition, creating a sense of solidarity; it inspires common action and is an indispensable driving force in the formation of states and dynasties.

It is true that there has been opposition among some Muslim thinkers to the concept of *asabiyyah*, which was condemned in no uncertain terms by the Prophet

Muhammad. *Asabiyyah* is a secular concept, denoting as it does a driving force in the formation of states and dynasties. However, Ibn Khaldun (1967: 1,414-5 [SI, 364-5]) argues:

All religious laws and practices and everything that the masses are expected to do requires group feeling [*asabiyyah*].... *Group feeling is necessary to the Muslim community*. Its existence enables (the community) to fulfil what God expects of it. Still, we find that the Lawgiver (Muhammad) censured group feeling and urged (us) to reject it and to leave it alone.... He recommended friendship among all Muslims and warned against discord and dissension. It should be known that in the opinion of the Lawgiver (Muhammad), all of this world is a vehicle for (transport to) the other world. He who loses the vehicle can go nowhere. When the Lawgiver (Muhammad) forbids or censures certain human activities or urges their omission, he does not want them to be neglected altogether. Nor does he want them to be completely eradicated, or the powers from which they result to remain altogether unused. He wants those powers to be employed as much as possible for the right aims. Every intention should thus eventually become the right one and the direction (of all human activities) one and the same.

The key phrase in the above quotation is the one that posits *asabiyyah* as necessary to the Muslim community. Significantly, the Arabic word that is translated 'community' is not *ummah*, but *millah*. The important difference is that *ummah* connotes a spiritual community of the world's Muslims, and is therefore a religious concept and not a secular concept, whereas a *millah* was a group that was defined in religious terms, but that existed as a political entity for the purposes of, for example, government and taxation. Thus, there is a distinction between the *ummah* and the *millah*, or between the religious and the secular.

Ibn Khaldun also points out that *asabiyyah* is needed for the success of *da'wa* (invitation to Islam, approximately equivalent to the Christian concept of evangelisation) and, more controversially, of prophecy. Ibn Khaldun reasons as follows:

Religious propaganda (*da'wa*) cannot materialize without group feeling. This is because ... every mass (political) undertaking requires group feeling. This is indicated in the ... tradition: 'God sent no prophet who did not enjoy the protection of his people.' If this was the case with the prophets, who are among human beings those most likely to perform wonders, one would (expect it to apply) all the more so to others. One

cannot expect them to be able to work the wonder of achieving superiority without group feeling (Ibn Khaldun 1967: 1,322 [SI,286]).

On prophecy, Ibn Khaldun goes further still, asserting that *asabiyyah* is not only necessary, but instrumental in its fulfilment. He writes:

Heraclius said, 'Whenever messengers are sent, they have prestige among their people.' That means that (such a man) has group feeling and influence which protect him from harm at the hands of unbelievers, until he has delivered the messages of his Lord and achieved the degree of complete perfection with respect to his religion and religious organization that God intended for him (Ibn Khaldun 1967: 1,188 [SI,168]).

Now, as Rosenthal pointed out in an earlier quotation, *asabiyyah* is a driving force in the formation of states and dynasties, an example of which could be the modern nation state.⁹ We shall discuss this shortly. What we are seeing now is that *asabiyyah* is a secular concept with religious significance, its religious significance makes it a part of Islam, but that there is nevertheless a legitimate contrast between *asabiyyah* as essential to the *millah* and the religious concept of the *ummah*.

The word *ummah* is not necessarily religious—it can be translated as community, referring to any community or tribe, and in modern Arabic it is used to mean 'nation'—but Ibn Khaldun and other Muslim writers, or writers about Islam, use it as a diminutive of *al-ummah al-islamiya* (the community of Islam), or *ummat Allah* (the community of God). Thus, it connotes an international community of the world's Muslims, in which national or ethnic differences are laid aside, and the allegiance to Islam is paramount. However, a consideration of the Islamic significance of the nation will enable us to understand better the Islamic (religious) meaning of the *ummah*, and its opposition to the (secular) concept of *asabiyyah*.

The Nation

It is possible to express this whole discussion in more modern terms if we take the concept of *asabiyyah* as having a modern equivalent, namely nationalism or national identity.¹⁰ Nationalism and national identities constitute a dilemma for Muslims, particularly those who wish to promote Islam as a political project. On the negative side, secularisation and the emergence of national identities has been a common historical process (see, for example, Anderson 1991: 9-19; Hobsbawm 1991: 67-79; McCrone 1998: 93; though cf. Hastings 1997: 185-209) and, of course, various contributors to the sociology of religion, national (and

ethnic) sentiments or identities can undermine the unity of the Muslim *ummah* (which is why *asabiyyah* was condemned by the Prophet Muhammad and, more recently, nationalism by Mawdudi¹¹), and they can lead to a confusion of national or local customs with the values and practices of Islam, or even a subordination of religious imperatives to the expediency of the nation state (which, as we have already seen, is a criticism that has also been made of theocracy). On the positive side, nationalism and national identities have played a leading role in liberating 'Muslim' countries from 'Western' rule, and in some cases this has led to some sort of Islamic government (though, of course, not all Muslims are convinced that this is a good thing). In a world of nation states, an Islamic project must ally itself with the nation in order to fulfil the *raison d'être* of Islam as a total system, as *din wa dawla*. So, not only is the earlier citation from Rosenthal (1965: 18)—showing that *asabiyyah* has not, in Muslim history, been considered fundamentally inimical to Islam—valid, but it is even now a necessary feature of the political Islamic movement, and, by extension, the ideas of the so-called 'fundamentalists' or 'orthodox Muslims' whose rhetoric is particularly opposed to *asabiyyah*.¹² Edward Said (1986: 150) argues that Ibn Khaldun's analysis of *asabiyyah* (like Foucault's analysis of discourse) implies an understanding and perhaps even appreciation of "the dynamics of secular events, their relentless pressure, their ceaseless movement, their elusive complexity which does not permit the luxury of easy moral classification." This moral complexity is perhaps another reason why *asabiyyah* is such a contested concept in Islamic discourses and yet so essential to their fulfilment. Akbar Ahmed (2003) argues that the discourses of Islamic 'exclusivists' are characterised by a 'hyper-*asabiyya*' that incorporates an excess of *asabiyyah* and a reaction to its disintegration and "is based in an exaggerated and even obsessive loyalty to the group and ... is usually expressed through hostility and often violence toward the other" (Ahmed 2003: 14).¹³

The concept of *ummah* is possibly more comparable with national identities, and more acceptable to Islamic thinkers. We can define the nation in Benedict Anderson's terms as "an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (Anderson 1991: 3, 6), so it is an aspiration rather than a fact. We can also say that the nation is associated with a dialectical process of inclusion and exclusion, by which members of the nation are defined *vis-à-vis* those who are excluded from membership (see Anderson 1991: 7; Nairn 1981: 329-63). Furthermore, according to Anderson (1991: 12ff.) and Anthony Smith (1986), nations emerged from extant cultural systems, including religious

communities, of which the Muslim *ummah* is a clear example. The Qur'an (*Al Baqarah*, 2: 143) presents this concept as follows:

Thus have We made of you
An *Ummah* justly balanced,
That ye might be witnesses
Over the nations,
And the Messenger a witness
Over yourselves.

In this Qur'anic verse, it is notable that the *ummah* is to the nations what the Messenger (*rasul*, i.e. Muhammad) is to the believers—that is, the pre-eminent one of that type.¹⁴ So, in comparing *ummah* and *asabiyyah*, like *din* and religion, we find that the one has a very particular religious meaning: in a sense, there is only *ummah* and one *din* that can be recognised, whereas there is a plurality of *asabiyyah* just as there is a plurality of religions. The plurality of peoples and nations is recognised elsewhere in the Qur'an, where it is written: "O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female and made you into nations and tribes that ye may know each other" (*Al Hujurat*, 49:13).

Conclusion: two Islamic Traditions

A synthesis of the 'diffusionist' and 'internalist' positions is that there has been an idea, or set of ideas, in Islam, through which the idea of the secular can be received, understood and also resisted (by some) *in Islamic terms*. Such a synthesis is possible, and I think it is correct, but it is particularly important to emphasise that the two positions outlined in this paper—that Islam is incompatible with a religious/secular dichotomy, and that there has been a concept of the secular in the diffusion and evolution of ideas within Islam—exist in opposition. That is, they *are* in opposition to each other, and both positions exist. So, I argue that on this issue there are two Islamic traditions, which I have labelled the 'theocratic' and the 'Khaldunian'. The former conceptualises Islam *sui generis*, emphasising the religious and the sacred, the *din* and the *ummah*, and the pre-eminence of the Messenger. The latter, in contrast, conceptualises Islam *sub generis*, as one religion among several, giving greater weight to the secular and the profane, the *dawla* and the *millah* or even the nation, and the believers themselves as they seek to be transformed by the Message. The subject of debate between these traditions can be expressed as follows: is the concept of the secular internal to (or compatible with) *Islam*, or is it merely contingent on the historical development of Muslim societies, particularly in the colonial and post-colonial periods?

What I have shown is that each of these traditions has a history within Islam, and that they exist as part of a logical sequence that can be defended and criticised from an Islamic standpoint. These perspectives are not unlike the 'types' of Islam identified by Gellner in his adaptation of the Khaldunian dialectic (his 'pendulum swing theory of Islam'), which posited a swing between an urban religion—characterised by puritanism, an emphasis on scripture and rules, and a *sui generis* conception of the religion ('strict monotheism')—and a rural, tribal, Bedouin religion—characterised by ritual, a religious life that is personalised and emotional, and a *sub generis* conception of religion as 'proliferation of the sacred', i.e. "religious pluralism in this and the other world and local incarnation of the sacred" (Gellner 1969: 7-8). My analysis is not incompatible with the theory of a pendulum swing between the theocratic and Khaldunian traditions. However, it may be that the opposition between these traditions will push them further apart, so, as it were, the pendulum will have to swing further and further if they are to be held within the one mutually recognised *ummah*.

Notes

Note: Quotations from the Qur'an are taken from the revised (1989) edition of Yusuf Ali's translation.

1. Halliday's formulation 'in all its forms' implies that this is true even of 'liberal Islam'. This is supported by Charles Kurzman (1998: 18) who contrasts liberal Islam with secularism (on the one hand, 'Islamic revivalism' on the other) on the basis of its belief "that Islam has an important role in the contemporary world."
2. Kari Barth (1958: 176) reasons as follows: "Ought tribute to be paid to Caesar or not? Well, the coin bears the image of Caesar, and there can be no doubt that authority rests in his hands, so: "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's—precisely those things and no more, is the obvious meaning—and to God the things that are God's". There is not a second kingdom of God outside and alongside the first. There is a human kingdom which is authoritative and can demand obedience only as such. And this kingdom is sharply delimited by the one kingdom of God."
3. For more extensive discussion of this ethnographic research, see Brown (1999, 2002).
4. Abdallah Laroui's arguments about complementarity—that the West and the Muslim world have consistently made opposite choices over the centuries—should be seen in this context. He writes: "le fait de complémentarité a présidé aux choix qu'ont fait au cours d'un millénaire Arabes et Européens dans des domaines aussi variés que la théologie (trinitarisme contre unitarisme), la métaphysique (immanence contre transcendance), l'esthétique (figuration contre abstraction), l'art militaire (infanterie contre cavalerie), l'architecture (maison ouverte contre maison fermée), urbanisme (rues orthogonales contre rues concentriques).... Si l'art occidental est évolution,

développement, diversification, l'art musulman, par contraste méthodologique, doit être stabilité, répétition, monotonie' (Laroui 1990: 156, 160) ['the dynamic of complementarity has presided over the choices that Arabs and Europeans have made for the past millennium, in domains as varied as theology (trinitarianism versus unitarianism), metaphysics (immanence versus transcendence), aesthetics (figuration versus abstraction), military strategies (infantry versus cavalry), architecture (the open house versus the closed house), urban planning (orthogonal streets versus concentric streets).... If Western art is evolution, development, diversification, Muslim art, by methodological contrast, must be stability, repetition, monotony" (my translation)].

5. As well as works cited in the text, many of the arguments developed in this section can be illuminated with reference to the following: Lawrence (ed.) (1984:7-8); Fischel (1967); Al-Azmeh (1982: 43); Lacoste (1984: 172-93); Baali and Wardi (1981); Al-Azmeh (1981: 74, 135, 138, 139); Corbin (1986: 385-90); Ahmed (2003 74-83, 90-2). Also, arguments including those presented in this and the following sections are applied to concepts of peace in Islam in Brown (2006).
6. "Neither Islam nor Christianity (nor, equally, Judaism) separate the temporal from the spiritual at the stage of their foundation. The monotheism at the level of representation that is accomplished by these religions implies a dualism which causes social function to disappear from their symbolic system. This process manifests itself in the following manner: compared to polytheistic representations, the monotheistic religions establish a system of belief around the idea of one God that is not directly based on a social function, but on a cultural bond that in turn is based on faith; the theocentrism of monotheistic representation goes hand in hand with a monopolisation of the symbolic system, with a unification of the system of reference and with a conflation of the sacred and the spiritual (therein lies the ideological function of monotheism); in the end, monotheistic representation denies humanity as an end-in-itself and rewrites humanity into a meta-history. Once this is accomplished, the temporal is rejected and cast out towards the profane. Thus, there is an ideological process of secularisation and negative laicisation that is common to all the monotheistic religions, because it is due to this monotheism at the level of representation itself" (my translation).
7. Strictly speaking, the *Muqaddimah* is the introduction to the *Kitab al-'Ibar*, or book of world history, but the term *Muqaddimah* has come to be used to refer to the Introduction and Book One of the *Kitab*, and sometimes, as here, to the whole work.
8. It would also be possible to analyse Ibn Khaldun's concept of *'umran* (civilisation).
9. Larbi Sadiki points to Wahhabism as providing a type of integrative *asabiyyah* for Saudi Arabia, although there many common characteristics of the nation state seem conspicuous by their absence (Sadiki 2003: 31-3). In this case, it seems to be Islam that supports *asabiyyah* rather than the other way round (as posited by Ibn Khaldun).

10. The concept of *asabiyyah* is confused with nationalism in some political Islamic discourses, though this confusion is of course quite anachronistic.
11. Mawdudi's views of nationalism are discussed by Youssef Choueiri (1997: 101-3), who points out that Mawdudi's opposition to nationalism was tempered by an (albeit reluctant) acceptance of the principle of nationality.
12. Sayyid Qutb's opposition to nationalism was at least as strong as Mawdudi's, but he nevertheless placed an "emphasis on the distinctive role of the Arabs in the fortunes of Islam", which, according to Choueiri, "stands out as a theoretical anomaly in so far as his radicalist ideology is concerned" (Choueiri 1997: 104-5).
13. For example, he suggests "that the Taliban who had set out to reinforce disintegrating *asabiyya* locally had ended up creating a state driven by hyper-*asabiyya*" (Ahmed 2003: 139).
14. The Arabic term translated nations is *an-naas*, more commonly translated mankind or humankind.

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Is There Really A Terrorist Threat To The West?

G.P. Ramachandra

Mainstream international relations discourse presupposes a Muslim terrorist threat to the West. Muslims, usually held to belong to a global terrorist network led by Osama bin Laden called al-Qaeda, are said to have carried out the September 11 attacks (hereafter 9/11) and atrocities which happened afterwards, such as the attacks in Bali, Madrid, London, and various assassinations. But the official version regarding 9/11 is unbelievably weak and it could be contested if Muslims were responsible for the other attacks. To appreciate this, it is absolutely essential that the reader should consult various web evidences available. Informed discussions have been going on for years on the Internet, and books also have appeared on this subject. Thanks to these efforts, skepticism about official claims has always been rife in the Middle East and Europe and is now spreading to the United States, where a recent poll showed that 36 per cent of Americans believe that the US government was complicit in the 9/11 attacks. The result is that the mass media have now been forced to take note of the 'conspiracy theories' and to state their main arguments, although very briefly. The Bush administration has a serious problem on its hands. In India, however, there is blind belief in the American version, even on the left. This paper will bring before the reader the main points critics have made against the official version of 9/11 and direct the reader to the more important electronic sources.¹ The majority of the critics would agree with most of these points, although some would dissent from a few of them. It will also look briefly at some of the later attacks. If there is no terrorist threat to the West, talk of terrorism is propaganda, meant to justify military intervention in the Middle East.

Immediately after the 9/11 attacks, experts noted that hitting a skyscraper with an airliner, which has very little maneuverability, required exceptional flying skills. Reports also surfaced then indicating that only a few of the hijackers had even been to flying school and instructors felt that the skills even of these men were almost non-existent.² There is a flagrant contradiction here, but the American media did not investigate and, very soon, such reports ceased to appear. The hijackers were said to have used box cutters—knives for cutting cardboard boxes—to hijack the planes. How could a few men armed with