Reflections on Islam and pacifism

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Abstract

This paper contends that the discourses that assume or assert that Islam and pacifism are incompatible are mistaken. They are premised on a homogenising discourse of Islam and of pacifism, inattention to Islam as an extant (rather than abstract) phenomenon, logical inconsistencies, and a limited Qur'anic hermeneutic. In contrast, I argue that Islam and pacifism are compatible, because pacifism has different meanings, because of *de facto* pacifism in Islam, because the logic of Islam, in certain cases, points towards pacifism, because pacifism can be discerned in the Qur'an and Hadith, because there is a concept of the secular within Islam that allows for pacifism, and because it is the *image* of Muslim violence that is primarily responsible for the belief that Islam and pacifism are incompatible.

INTRODUCTION

That Islam and pacifism are incompatible is a common assertion or assumption. This discourse of incompatibility takes different forms, which we can group into three types. Firstly, pacifism is represented as incompatible with the core Islamic tradition. This tradition provides an example of the Prophet as warrior, and an entirely understandable suggestion that all Muslims should seek to follow his example. The Qur'an explicitly sanctions the use of force in self-defence, to resist injustice, and to ensure that Islam can be practised freely. Thus, jihad can take the form of military struggle, and, in the appropriate circumstances, is a duty for all Muslims. Because pacifism holds that military force can never be justified, this line of argument goes, Islam and pacifism are incompatible. Secondly, there are various conflicts around the world that include people who participate, in some sense, in the name of Islam. In Samuel Huntington's words: 'Islam has bloody borders' (Huntington 1993: 35) – with Hinduism, Christianity, Judaism, Western capitalism and nation states, secularism, Buddhism, and more. This is represented as indicative of an essential bellicosity in Islam – whether in the religion, culture, or Muslim psyche – that is manifestly incompatible with pacifism. Thirdly, pacifism depends on a separation of the sphere of religion from the (secular) sphere of society, and because no such separation is possible in Islam, Islam is logically incompatible with pacifism. This argument was made by David Martin in his

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classic text on pacifism: Islam is 'a lay religion which frowns upon religious orders' (Martin 1965: 21), and it is such orders that have the potential to formulate the sort of otherworldly perfectionism that makes pacifism possible.

It is my contention, which I expound in this paper, that these discourses are all mistaken. They are premised on a homogenising discourse of Islam and of pacifism, inattention to Islam as an extant (rather than abstract) phenomenon, logical inconsistencies, and a limited Qur'anic hermeneutic. In contrast, I argue that Islam and pacifism are compatible, for reasons that are here grouped into six sections: the meaning of pacifism; de facto pacifism in Islam; the logic of Islam (which, in certain cases, points towards pacifism); the core tradition (that is, pacifism in the Qur'an and Hadith); the concept of the secular (I argue, against Martin, that there is a concept of the secular in Islam, and so, even if the separation of the religious and secular spheres is a necessary precondition for pacifism, pacifism is still logically possible); and the image of Muslim violence (which image, I contend, is primarily responsible for the belief that Islam and pacifism are incompatible). I will discuss these points, in turn, shortly.

Before doing so, it seems appropriate to consider the question of what right a 'non-Muslim' (like myself) has to write about such issues. This is particularly important because this paper includes discussion of the 'logic of Islam' and the 'core tradition'; in other words, I permit myself to interpret the core texts and principles of Islam, and to draw conclusions about their meaning. Some people would (and do) argue that I have no right to do so, because I am not a Muslim – at least not in the conventionally understood sense of the word – and, as such, I have not committed myself to the Qur'an as divine revelation, to the truth of Islam, or even to its relevance. *Ijtihad*, the struggle to interpret the requirements of Islam-as-practice, is properly an Islamic exercise. In contrast, so the argument runs, I am not committing myself to anything by writing this article; I am merely performing an academic exercise that seeks to impose commitments on others (but, to emphasise the point, not myself).

It is not hard to be sympathetic with this argument, but it must be rejected, at least in its 'hard' form, for three reasons. Firstly, the argument presented in this article is permissive, not prescriptive. It argues that Islam and pacifism are *compatible*, certainly not that Islam, correctly understood, *necessarily* entails pacifism. Some parts of the argument contend that Islam *logically* entails pacifism, but I do not claim that there is no counter-argument. In fact, the purpose of this article, as I have conceived it, is primarily to undermine an idea of Islam as monolithic. This is a project that is central to the critique of Orientalism, many Muslims have commented on its necessity, and it is hard to see how it can be undertaken without interpreting the texts and principles of Islam itself. Secondly, Edward Said explicitly, and rightly, rejects 'the limited proposition that only . . . a Muslim [can write] about Islam' (Said 1995: 322; see also Said 1985: 27). A claim that Islam is necessarily opposed to pacifism is an attempt to impose a boundary around Islam, to exclude a group or groups of people from membership of that category. But these boundaries must be questioned, because such questioning is essential both to the social scientific understanding of Islam and to the critique of Orientalism. Therefore, a social scientist who is interested in Islam, or a critic of Orientalism, must be able to examine these boundaries. In any case, if only Muslims are capable of understanding Islam, then it must also be the case that only 'non-Muslims' are

capable of understanding 'non-Muslim' representations of Islam, and, since 'non-Muslim' representations of Islam are an essential part of my argument, I as a 'non-Muslim' am qualified to write this article in a way that Muslim writers are not. This is clearly untenable. Thirdly, it is necessary for other 'non-Muslims'—including, I hope, some readers of this article—to understand that speaking (or writing) the words 'Islam' and 'peace' in the same sentence is not merely a part of the discourse of an anaemic 'lowest-common-denominator' civic religion, nor is it part of an attempt to provide 'excuses' for acts of terrorism or to mislead people about the 'true' nature of Islam. It would seem idealistic if I were to claim that such is the objective of this article, and it would be misleading, because my objectives are more straightforwardly academic. However, it does provide much of the inspiration for this article, and why I believe that the project of highlighting areas of compatibility between Islam and pacifism is a worthwhile project.

THE MEANING OF PACIFISM

The above discourses of incompatibility, particularly the first and third, suffer from a narrow conception of pacifism. The essential distinction is between absolute (or universal) pacifism on the one hand, and vocational pacifism on the other. The former denotes a form of pacifism that is held to be normative for a whole society and indeed for the whole of humanity. The latter denotes pacifism as a lifestyle for a group of people, such as a monastic order. It was only around the beginning of the twentieth century that universal pacifism became socially significant, and thus the term 'pacifism' was born (originally in French, but soon afterwards in English and other languages). What had existed beforehand, for the most part, was vocational pacifism. So religious virtuosi (to use Max Weber's term), such as the monks and nuns of Catholicism and Buddhism, were expected to live as pacifists, but this was not held to be a normative principle for the State or for secular society. It was part of what set the religious virtuosi apart from that society. Where whole religious communities—such as the Quakers or Anabaptists—were pacifist, this was also a case of vocational pacifism. True, it was not just the leaders or virtuosi who would live as pacifists, but pacifism was a part of the vocation of the entire community, it was a function of their self-definition as 'a peculiar people', a religious community set apart from the world. In other words, pacifism was a part of what distinguished them from non-Quakers or non-Anabaptists, and it was essential to this rigid distinction between the faithful and the world that pacifism could not be a universal norm, valid for humanity as a whole.

A secondary distinction that needs to be observed is between pacifism as opposition to war and pacifism as opposition to violence. In the writings of Tolstoy (1921) and Paul Ricoeur (2001), pacifism (or non-violence, which Ricoeur contrasts with 'a certain pacifism' that remains passive in the face of injustice) is defined as opposition to violence, not war, and violence is defined as coercion (physical and, we might add, following Pierre Bourdieu and his collaborators, symbolic [e.g. Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992]), exercised *par excellence* by the State in order to assert its authority, to transform the revolutionary impulse that is at the foundation of every state into a statutory, bureaucratic, authoritarian order. Pacifism, therefore, is opposition to such violence, a reversion to the revolutionary impulse, and this may not be entirely 'peaceful'. Where Islam is conceived in

terms of opposing injustice in the name of the absolute justice that is a property of God, and where pacifism is conceived as opposition to violence *qua* the coercion exercised by the State, there is no incompatibility between Islam and pacifism. It is the coercion itself that is incompatible with the Qur'anic dictum of 'no compulsion in religion' (Surah 2:256).

Where pacifism is not conceived in these terms, however, it is vocational pacifism that is incompatible with Islam, not universal pacifism. David Martin is right when he points out that Islam's rejection of a 'double standard' between the religious virtuosi and the laity (this is expressed in the Hadith which states that there is 'no monkery in Islam') or between the believers and the unbelievers (all of who are subject to the absolute sovereignty of Allah and the moral principles issuing from that sovereignty) is logically incompatible with vocational pacifism, though it should be emphasised that it is vocational pacifism to which Martin refers, not universal pacifism.

Even the example of the Prophet as warrior does not prove that Islam is incompatible with absolute or universal pacifism. This is because it is not a necessary feature of pacifism that the pacifist take a position on wars that happened in the past. There is no practical purpose in doing so, and it is much more productive to focus one's energies on opposing wars that are taking place at the present time, or that may occur in the foreseeable future. In addition, what is called 'war' at the present time and what was called 'war' in the first century AH (that is, the first century of the Muslim calendar, which began in 622AD/CE) are qualitatively quite different, and therefore the Prophetic example cannot be imported into the twenty-first century without extensive contextualisation. Such contextualisation would have to take account of the injunctions – laid down in the Qur'an and Hadith – that are aimed at the prevention of what is today called 'collateral damage'. In today's context, these injunctions seem so restrictive as to make the promotion of war, in any circumstances, difficult to justify.

DE FACTO PACIFISM IN ISLAM

There is a contrast between theological and sociological analysis when it comes to the relationship between Islam and Muslims. Whereas the former (which is also the discourse of many practising, believing Muslims) takes Islam as an *a priori*, laid down in the foundational texts of Islam and developments of Islamic theology and law, and defines Muslims as those who conform to the precepts, beliefs and practices of Islam, the latter (which is common to the form of analysis found across the social sciences and humanities) takes Muslims as the *a priori* – that is, all who regard themselves as Muslims and are widely accepted as such by other Muslims – and defines Islam as the *de facto* beliefs and practices of Muslims *qua* Muslims. Analysed sociologically, then, it is sufficient to demonstrate that there are Muslims who are pacifist, and who understand their pacifism in Islamic terms, in order to show that Islam is compatible with pacifism. Given that there are about 900 million Muslims worldwide, it would be very surprising were this not the case.

It does, nevertheless, seem necessary (whether epistemologically or practically) to augment this argument in two ways: firstly, to provide *examples* of such *de facto* pacifism in Islam; secondly, to show that Islam and pacifism are also *theologically* compatible, in the above sense of theological. I will deal with the theological question later. Examples of

de facto pacifism in Islam include the following. Firstly, there is the quietism of many Sufi groups. While this does not necessarily show a *political* commitment to pacifism as such, it nevertheless encapsulates pacifism as a way of life, initially in the vocational sense, and, through the Sufi yearning for the realisation of the unity of all things with the Divine, in a universal or absolute sense as well. Secondly, there is the explicit pacifism articulated by members of the Bahá'í faith, who call for the abolition of war and propose various means to accomplish that goal. Although the Bahá'í are not regarded as Muslims, nor do they regard themselves as Muslims, but as a different faith altogether, it is nevertheless the case that their roots are in Islam (specifically Shaykhism, a nineteenth-century form of Iranian Twelver Shi'ism), and that the reason for their separation from Islam has nothing to do with their pacifism. Rather, it is their rejection of the orthodox Islamic doctrine of *nabawwa* (prophecy) – specifically the belief that Muhammad is the seal of the Prophets, the final Messenger sent by God to Humankind – in favour of a belief that God has continued to send Prophets up to the present day (and will in all likelihood continue to do so), that constitutes that reason. Thirdly, 'progressive Islamist' scholars such as Farid Esack in South Africa have consciously sought to ground Qur'anic interpretation in a 'hermeneutic circle' that emphasises the experience of oppression (including sexist oppression), a transformed and de-reified understanding of the Qur'an in the light of this experience of oppression, inter-religious solidarity against oppression, and an active opposition to the oppressive violence of the state as analysed by such writers as Tolstoy and Ricoeur (Esack 1997). Many of these principles are common to a range of liberal Islamic ideas (e.g. Arkoun 1984, 1994; Rahman 1979, 1999; see also Kurzman 1998), and may at least potentially be manifest in a political commitment to pacifism, in one form or another. Fourthly, organisations like the Muslim Peace Fellowship in the United States do turn such principles – whether they are as sophisticated as the hermeneutic circle or simply based on a 'fresh', 'open-minded' reading of the Qur'an – into a commitment to non-violence or pacifism. Such epistemology and praxis is also articulated or reported by a number of authors and contributors to edited collections, although they do not constitute an organisation as such (Satha-Anand 1990, 1996; Paige, Satha-Anand and Gilliat 1993; Johansen 1997; Harris 1998; Said, Funk and Kadayifi 2001, Said, Funk and Kadayifi 2002).

THE LOGIC OF ISLAM

Of course, it may well be objected that Islam being *sociologically* compatible with pacifism means no more than that there are certain Muslims who, however misguidedly, regard Islam and pacifism as compatible. It would no doubt be possible to find some Muslims, out of the 900 million or so Muslims worldwide, who believe almost anything and who articulate that belief in Islamic terms. As such, there could be atheists, or polytheists, or devil worshippers, who regard themselves as Muslim and their atheism, polytheism or devil worship as entirely compatible with Islam. However, it would stretch credulity to say that Islam can still be Islam if it abandons its belief in *tawhid* (monotheism, or divine unicity) for one of these systems of belief or practice. So, the objection runs, *de facto* pacifism among (those who refer to themselves as) Muslims proves nothing.

I have already hinted (I think) that I consider the sociological form of analysis, as

expounded in the previous section, to be an epistemological presupposition. As such, it is neither more nor less grounded than the theological form of analysis. I do not know, nor can I conceive of, any reason to suppose that either form of analysis is inherently superior to the other. So, I will not attempt to argue against the aforementioned objection. Rather, I will argue that Islam, *as well as* being sociologically compatible with pacifism, is *also* theologically compatible with pacifism. I argue this in two ways. Firstly, in this section, I argue in terms of the logic of Islam. That is, I argue that certain elements of Islam, that are theologically core elements, logically entail an acceptance that Islam and pacifism are compatible. (I do not suggest that these core elements *necessarily* entail a commitment to pacifism, because this would impose a monolithic understanding of Islam, albeit a different monolithic understanding from the usual one.) Second, in the next section, I argue that pacifist principles are elucidated in the 'core tradition' of Islam – the Qur'an and Hadith – itself.

In order to argue from the logic of Islam, I begin with the concept of *jihad*. This concept is popularly thought to mean 'holy war', and it is undeniably true that one of its meanings – both in the 'core tradition' of Islam and in later traditions – is a military one. However, as has been pointed out countless times, *jihad* actually means effort, or struggle. The English word struggle can have a military connotation, but its meaning is not *essentially* military. It is the same with the Arabic word *jihad*. Furthermore, the Prophet Muhammad is quoted in the Hadith literature as saying that the lesser *jihad*, which was military in nature, was past, but the greater *jihad*, which was spiritual in nature – struggling against the baser instincts to be a better person and a better Muslim – lay ahead. As such, struggling to establish peace in a situation of conflict can be an act of *jihad*, and so the existence of that concept does not in itself invalidate the argument that Islam and pacifism are incompatible.

It is sometimes said that *jihad* is the sixth pillar of Islam. This is manifestly not the case, however, because Islam has five pillars, not six. But let us accept, for the sake of argument, that *jihad* is an obligation on all Muslims, and that *jihad* has, in certain circumstances, a military meaning. This was the first form of the 'discourse of incompatibility' between Islam and pacifism that was identified in the introduction, and it is indeed a persuasive argument. In contrast, however, it can be argued that it neglects the necessary priority of *islam* over *jihad*. The former concept can be translated as peace, or being at peace (through submission to Allah), and it is, of course, the name of the religion under discussion (and the name 'Islam', unlike 'Christianity', is not an accident of history, but the name that the Qur'an asserts was given to the religion by God [Surah 5:3]). So, for all meanings of *jihad*, it is *jihad* that is a tenet of *Islam*, not vice versa. So *jihad* must be interpreted in the context of islam, or struggle in the context of peace. It is not unreasonable to suggest that this logically entails a rejection of war as incompatible with peace, and so it is possible to make this suggestion within, rather than against, an Islamic discourse. Incidentally, Farid Esack suggests that *jihad* is an aspect of *iman* rather than *islam*, or faith rather than practice, which separates it still further from the discourse of incompatibility between Islam and pacifism.

One of the five (not six) pillars of Islam is, of course, the *hajj*, the pilgrimage to Mecca. Bawa Yamba (1995: 182) points out that: 'During jihad the road to Mecca is, of necessity, closed – both in reality and symbolically'. In other words, during *jihad* there can be no *hajj*, and, by deduction, since the *hajj* is a pillar of Islam and *jihad* is not, there can be no *jihad*

when it interferes with the *hajj*. Of course, the *hajj* only takes place at a certain time of year, and in any case there is no obligation to perform the *hajj* if one is unable to do so, and *jihad* may well constitute a reason for being unable to do so. However, the *hajj* is more than just an annual event. This becomes apparent when we consider the following. Approximately 2 million Muslims perform the *hajj* every year. There are approximately 900 million Muslims in the world. Therefore, it would take 450 years for all of the Muslims who are currently alive to perform the *hajj*, which would clearly be impossible. We can calculate that (given that some Muslims perform the *hajj* more than once) no more than 15 per cent of Muslims worldwide perform the *hajj*, while at least 85 per cent do not. So the vast majority of Muslims do *not* perform the *hajj*, but it is still a pillar of Islam for them, as much as for those who actually make the journey to Mecca. For it to be a pillar of Islam in any meaningful sense for the majority of Muslims, then, two things are necessary. Firstly, they need to have the intention, or at least hope, of performing the pilgrimage one day. Secondly, the *hajj* must somehow become an aspect of the Muslim's daily life. It is as if the Muslim is always on, or preparing for, *hajj*, and therefore the gate to Mecca must always be open. So, according to the logic of Islam, *jihad* in any sense that would close the gates to Mecca, including a military sense, can be interpreted as incompatible with the fifth pillar of Islam. So pacifism is necessarily compatible with Islam. Perhaps that is one reason why it has long been a principle of Twelver Shi'a Islam that 'there is no holy war in the absence of the Last Imam' (Loeffler 1988: 237), and even Ayatollah Khomeini's teachings have not entirely succeeded in extinguishing this principle.

THE CORE TRADITION

The objection still stands, however, that sociological and logical arguments are insignificant when seen against the teachings of the Qur'an and Hadith, which Muslims take to be inspired – directly in the case of the Qur'an, indirectly in the case of the Hadith – by God. However, although the Qur'an and Hadith can be, and are, cited in support of a military concept of *jihad*, they can also be cited in support of the argument that Islam and pacifism are compatible. I have already mentioned two examples: the notion of the greater *jihad* as a spiritual struggle, explicitly contrasted with military struggle; and the rules laid down for the prevention of 'collateral damage'.

There are two excerpts from the Qur'an that, while less specific, make the point in terms of theological principle. Surah 2:115, a verse that has been cited in a great deal of Sufi writing, says that 'wherever you turn there is the face of God'. It seems hard to conceive of a fellow human being as showing 'the face of God', and yet kill that human being, which would be necessary in war. Surah 25:63 says that 'the true servants of Allah are those who walk humbly upon the earth and when molested by the ignorant reply "Peace"', which does not sound very different from the injunction of Jesus Christ, as reported in the Gospels, to 'turn the other cheek', and this injunction has been one of the foundations of Christian pacifism, vocational and universal, for centuries.

Although, for some, these arguments are the most important, I deal with them very briefly, because all that is necessary is to show that there are some texts from the Qur'an or Hadith that can reasonably be interpreted in pacifist terms. It would be possible to look

at the various interpretations and exegeses of these texts that have been proffered (such as those discussed by Gätje 1996), but this would be to take them out of the core tradition and into the evolving historical tradition – which would not be a bad thing in itself, but would be superfluous in this context. Having shown that there are texts that can reasonably be interpreted in pacifist terms, then, we have established that Islam and pacifism are compatible in a way that is rooted in the core tradition of Islam.

The question remains, however, of why it is that violence is sometimes justified in the name of the Qur'an. This is an important question. In the aftermath of the hijacking and crashing of four aeroplanes in the United States, on 11 September 2001, sales of the Qur'an in the USA and elsewhere increased significantly, presumably because people were asking themselves the same question and wanted to know what had motivated the hijackers. If so, they will have been disappointed. There is nothing in the Qur'an to justify such actions, but, for the believer in a scriptural religion, allegiance to the text *itself* often supersedes attention to its *contents*. The fact that the believer demonstrates a passionate allegiance to the text therefore justifies anything that the believer does as a believer. This is not a criticism of religion *per se*, nor is it an attempt to absolve the theological refinements of religion from any worldly responsibility, but it is an argument for investigating the foundations of religion, which (at least at the sociological level) are human foundations, not divine revelations or superstitious deceptions. These foundations can support violence or pacifism.

THE CONCEPT OF THE SECULAR

The remaining objection is the one presented in the introduction to this paper, taken from David Martin's work, which is that pacifism depends on a separation of the religious and secular spheres, and because no such separation is possible in Islam, Islam is logically incompatible with pacifism. The apparent 'double standard' of the 'two kingdoms' theology is inconsistent with the spirit of Islam, but, as we have already remarked, this only shows that Islam is incompatible with *vocational* pacifism, as outlined earlier. However, it is not necessarily the case that there is no distinction between the religious and secular spheres in Islam. This is for two reasons, the first of which can be expressed in terms of the diffusionist principle in anthropological theory, the second in terms of principles internal to Islam as a practice and as a project.

If there is no distinction between the religious and the secular, there is no concept of the secular, because both concepts – religious and secular – exist only in contradistinction to one another. So, if the concept of the secular exists in Islam, there is *prima facie* a distinction between the religious and secular spheres. No society or culture exists in isolation, but they borrow from one another, and frequently keep what they have borrowed. Thus, even if the concept of the secular was originally Christian or Western, this does not mean that it is illegitimate in a Muslim society. 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) remarks that: 'Our view of religions . . . is oddly static. We expect them to prosper or decline; we do not expect them to change'; an expectation of stasis that is even more marked in the case of Islam. Said (1995) has defined Orientalism partly in terms of a supposition that the Orient (including Islam)

was homogeneous and unchanging. So, the Muslim Orient has been regarded as incapable of incorporating or learning anything from the West, and, of course, it has been regarded as unnecessary for the West to learn or absorb anything from the Orient.

In more epistemological terms, we can consider Aziz Al-Azmeh's criticisms of Orientalists, and of some Muslims, who perpetuate a discourse of cultural authenticity. Recognition of the diversity of Islam entails a critique of homogenising discourses of Islam, or an anti-historicism that is predicated both on the stasis of Muslim society, and on the impossibility of cultural and conceptual diffusion. Al-Azmeh argues that there has been 'an objective complicity between [Orientalist discourses of] exoticism and the [so-called 'fundamentalist'] rhetoric of identity and authenticity . . . , [which is] both past and future linked congenitally by the ontological void of today' (Al-Azmeh 1996: 28, 89). For our purposes, a critique of this 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 regarded as an illegitimate accretion of the present day onto the Prophetic past and the utopian, Messianic future, then we must recognise that its diffusion is a part of the history of Muslim societies, and indeed of an Islamic history that is conceived in 'sociological' (as the term has been used in this article) and anti-essentialist terms.

But the argument is not just epistemological, for there has been an *internal* distinction, *within* Islam, between the religious and the secular, or an analogous distinction, for centuries. According to Mohammed Mouaqit (1984), the ideological basis of secularisation has proceeded from monotheism itself, because (to simplify) monotheism monopolises the symbolic system and so the temporal becomes profane, separate from the religious.

In his analysis of the concept of a*sabiyyah* in his fourteenth-century *Muqaddimah*, Ibn Khaldun not only makes an implicit distinction between a secular state and a religious community, but suggests that the secular state is essential to the religious community. Erwin Rosenthal (1965: 18) explains the concept as follows:

> '*Asabiya* is a concept of Ibn Khaldun's that has aroused the opposition of modern orthodox Muslim thinkers . . . [H]e stresses its significance, saying it is needed for the success of prophecy and of *da'wa* . . . Its foremost role . . . 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.

So, *asabiyyah* is a driving force in the formation of states and dynasties, for example the modern nation state, and it is a secular concept. However, Ibn Khaldun (1967:414 [I,364]) 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.

So, *asabiyyah* is necessary to the Muslim community. Significantly, the Arabic word that is translated as '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.

Rosenthal also pointed out that *asabiyyah* was essential for the success of prophecy and the propagation of Islam. To express this in secular terms, we can equate the concept of *asabiyyah* with nationalism or national identity (although the concepts should not be confused). Nationalism and national identities constitute a dilemma for those Muslims who wish to promote Islam as a political project. Not only have secularisation – problematic for those committed to such a project – and the emergence of national identities have been parts of a common historical process[2], but national and ethnic sentiments or identities can undermine the unity of the Muslim *ummah*, 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. However, 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. 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, *asabiyyah* 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*.

Therefore, there is necessarily a concept of the secular in Islam, even those forms of Islam that are consciously anti-secular, so this reason for asserting that Islam and pacifism are incompatible does not stand up.

THE IMAGE OF MUSLIM VIOLENCE

I have argued that Islam and pacifism are compatible – in terms of the nature of pacifism, sociologically, in terms of the logic of Islam, in the core tradition of Islam, and because of a secular tradition within Islam – and I have remarked that Islam is perceived as violent when allegiance to the text itself supersedes allegiance to its content. The perception of Muslim violence is also constructed and refracted through centuries-old Western representations of Islam, as Edward Said (e.g. 1993, 1995, 1997) and others have shown, and these discourses influence Muslims' perception of themselves and their religion. There has been and remains a dominant Western belief that Islam was spread by the sword. Certainly, there are a few examples of conversion to Islam going hand in hand with military conquest, but, as has been observed on countless occasions, this has never been the norm. Arab armies conquered Egypt about three centuries before Islam became the majority religion there. The Mogul armies conquered vast swathes of Muslim territory before eventually converting to Islam themselves. The Crusades were seen as providing further evidence that Islam was a violent religion, but such violence was evaluated inconsistently. That of the Crusader armies was

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2   See, for example, Anderson 1991: 9–19; Hobsbawm 1991: 67–79; McCrone 1998: 93; though
    compare Hastings 1997: 185–209 and, of course, various contributors to the sociology of religion.

legitimated in terms of indulgence (reduction of time in purgatory for oneself or other people), necessity or duty, while that of the Muslim armies provided evidence of cruelty or a propensity to violence that was innate to Muslims (Miles and Brown 2003: 28; Daniel 1960: 109-13, 1975: 111-39).

This violent image was not constant, and there were conversions to Islam in England during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Also, the sensual stereotype – belly dancers, harems, snake charmers – which had existed in the Middle Ages, was systematised in nineteenth-century Orientalist writings. There were differences: French Orientalists often saw the Muslim world as dominated by (almost Freudian) sexual symbolism, while British Orientalists saw a kind of Oriental indolence which was a consequence of religion and climate (see, for example, Said 1995: 40, 182-8). At this time, the Orient, the Muslim world, was exotic. The image of Islam as a *threat* developed from the opening of the Suez Canal – which made the Orient much closer and no longer exotic – to the present day via the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, the oil crisis of the 1970s, the Iranian Revolution, the Rushdie affair, 9/11, and so on. The image of Muslim irrationality seems as close as we can get to an historical constant (though the use of Arabic manuscripts in Western centres of learning before the Crusades undermines even that).

One variable that has contributed to the violent image of Islam, and thus the view that Islam and pacifism are incompatible, has been the significance of physical signifiers and the attribution of 'racial' (phenotypical and behavioural) characteristics, that is, racialisation. The term 'racialisation' is used by Miles and Brown (2003: 101) 'to denote those instances where social relations between people have been structured by the signification of human biological characteristics in such a way as to define and construct differentiated social collectivities'. Where Muslims are represented as sharing innate biological (including phenotypical) or behavioural characteristics, it is likely that they are being racialised, and such representation has been observed as characteristic of Islamophobia (e.g. Brown 2000). A consequence of such racialisation is that violence is seen not simply as characteristic of Muslims, but as innate to Muslims.

However, the issue is more complex. Sociological theories of racism and racialisation are almost unanimous on the modernity of these phenomena. The theories are correct, because racism was not a normal way of thinking before the late eighteenth century, though other forms of representation and exclusion (including religious exclusion) were. However, there are isolated empirical examples of racism, or something like racism, which predate the modern period. In Pope Urban II's speech initiating the First Crusade, he referred to the Muslim armies as 'Persian', 'an alien people, a race completely foreign to God', 'unclean people, who . . . defile the Holy Places with their filth' (cited in Williams 1990: 35). This 'filth' would not have been understood in terms of ceremonial impurity, because that concept was peripheral to Western Christianity, but in terms of the 'foreign', quasi-racialised Other. Thus, the violence of the Crusaders was not carried out solely against Muslims, but also Jews, pagans and even Eastern Christians, who shared religious similarities with the Crusaders but who were also represented as a quasi-'racial' Other (Miles and Brown 2003: 29).

The current stereotype of Muslim violence and terrorism seems paradoxically de-racialised. However, what is crucial is the combination of racialisation and de-racialisation. Islam is represented as ideologically homogeneous, Muslims as 'racially' homogeneous,

and therefore Muslims are represented *in toto* as constituting a threat. In this context, it is not surprising that Islam is represented in Western discourses as essentially violent, and therefore incompatible with pacifism. Nor is it surprising, given the hegemony of such discourses, that they influence Muslims' perceptions of themselves and their own religion. Consequently, therefore, it should not be surprising that Muslims, as well as those who represent Islam in more Orientalist terms, should articulate the discourse of incompatibility between Islam and pacifism.

CONCLUSION

Islam is sociologically and theologically compatible with pacifism, both at the foundational level and in the logical and historical developments from those foundations. The image of Islam as essentially violent, and of the Muslim as terrorist, is based on historical contingency, a selective interpretation of Islam (carried out in Orientalist representation and by some Muslims), and on a process of de-racialisation. The racialisation of the Muslim creates an image of the Arab, the Pakistani, the Afghan or the Iranian as terrorist, and an amalgam (which French Muslims have called an '*Islamalgame*') of religion, nationality and violence.

This amalgam is a self-fulfilling prophecy, which makes the world a more dangerous place. When Orientalist fears are interpreted as Muslim radicalism, and the deafness of the West is interpreted as the silence of the Muslim majority, violence may be the only form of communication left, and violence begets violence. Understanding Islam in its depth, complexity and diversity, and understanding Western perceptions of Islam in their depth, complexity and diversity, are two things that we scholars can do to restrain this danger.

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