IDENTITY AND VIOLENCE

THE ILLUSION OF DESTINY

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W. W. NORTON & COMPANY
NEW YORK • LONDON

vision gets significantly reinforced by the implicit support the anti-Western fundamentalist warriors get from theories bred in the Western countries of singular categorization of people of the world.

The second difficulty with civilizational partitioning used in this approach is that it is based on extraordinary descriptive crudeness and historical innocence. Many of the significant diversities within each civilization are effectively ignored, and interactions between them are substantially overlooked.

These twin failures produce a remarkably impoverished understanding of different civilizations and their similarities, connections, and interdependence in science, technology, mathematics, literature, trade, commerce, and political, economic, and social ideas. The foggy perception of global history yields an astonishingly limited view of each culture, including an oddly parochial reading of Western civilization.

CHAPTER 4

RELIGIOUS AFFILIATIONS AND MUSLIM HISTORY

Recent theses about clashing civilizations have tended to draw much on religious difference as a central characteristic of differing cultures. However, aside from the conceptual flaw in seeing human beings in terms of only one affiliation and the historical mistake of overlooking the critically important interrelations between what are assumed to be largely detached and discrete civilizations (both problems were discussed in the last chapter), these civilizational theories also suffer from having to overlook the heterogeneity of religious affiliations that characterize most countries and, even more, most civilizations. The last problem can be quite a big one, too, since people of the same reli-

gion are frequently spread over many different countries and several distinct continents. For example, as was mentioned earlier, India may be seen by Samuel Huntington as a "Hindu civilization," but with nearly 150 million Muslim citizens, India is also among the three largest Muslim countries in the world. Religious categorization cannot be easily fitted into classifications of countries and civilizations.

This last problem can be overcome by classifying people not into lumpy civilizational units with religious correlates (like "Islamic civilization," "Hindu civilization," and such as in Huntington's categorization), but directly in terms of the religious groupings of people. This would lead to a neater and less defective classification, and it has, not surprisingly, appealed to many. Viewing individuals in terms of their religious affiliations has certainly become quite common in cultural analysis in recent years. Does this make the religion-centered analysis of the people of the world a helpful way of understanding humanity?

I have to argue that it does not. This may be a more coherent classification of the people of the world than civilized categorization, but it makes the same mistake of attempting to see human beings in terms of only one affiliation, viz. religion. In many contexts, such a classification can be rather helpful (for example, in determining the choice of religious holidays, or ensuring the safety of places of worship), but to take that to be the overarching basis of social, political, and cultural analysis in general would amount to overlooking all the other associations and loyalties any individual may have, and which could be significant in the person's behavior, identity, and self-understanding. The crucial need to take note of the plural identities of people and their choice of priorities survives the replacement of civilizational classifications with a directly religious categorization.

Indeed, the increasingly common use of religious identities

as the leading—or sole—principle of classification of the people of the world has led to much grossness of social analysis. There has been, in particular, a major loss of understanding in the failure to distinguish between (1) the various affiliations and loyalties a person who happens to be a Muslim has, and (2) his or her Islamic identity in particular. The Islamic identity can be one of the identities the person regards as important (perhaps even crucial), but without thereby denying that there are other identities that may also be significant. What is often called "the Islamic world" does, of course, have a preponderance of Muslims, but different persons who are all Muslims can and do vary greatly in other respects, such as political and social values, economic and literary pursuits, professional and philosophical involvements, attitude to the West, and so on. The global lines of division can be very differently drawn for these "other affiliations." To focus just on the simple religious classification is to miss the numerous—and varying—concerns that people who happen to be Muslim by religion tend to have.

The distinction can be extremely important, not least in a world in which Islamic fundamentalism and militancy have been powerful and in which Western opposition to them is often combined with a significant, if vaguely formulated, suspicion of Muslim people in general. Aside from the conceptual crudity reflected in that general attitude, it also overlooks the more obvious fact that Muslims differ sharply in their political and social beliefs. They also differ in their literary and artistic tastes, in their interest in science and mathematics, and even in the form and extent of their religiosity. While the urgency of immediate politics has led to a somewhat better understanding in the West of religious subcategories within Islam (such as the distinction between a person's being a Shia or a Sunni), there is a growing reluctance to go beyond them to take adequate note of the many nonreligious

identities Muslim people, like other people in the world, have. But the ideas and priorities of Muslims on political, cultural, and social matters can diverge greatly.

Religious Identity and Cultural Variations

There can also be vast differences in the social behavior of different persons belonging to the same religion, even in fields often thought to be closely linked with religion. This is easy to illustrate in the contemporary world, for example, in contrasting the typical practices of traditionalist rural women in, say, Saudi Arabia and those of Muslim women in urban Turkey (where head scarves are rare, with dress codes that are often similar to those of European women). It can also be illustrated by noting the vast differences in the habits of socially active women in Bangladesh and the less outgoing women in more conservative circles in the very same country, even though the persons involved may all be Muslim by religion.

These differences must not, however, be seen simply as aspects of a new phenomenon that modernity has brought to Muslim people. The influence of other concerns, other identities, can be seen throughout the history of Muslim people. Consider a debate between two Muslims in the fourteenth century. Ibn Battuta, who was born in Tangier in 1304 and spent thirty years in various travels in Africa and Asia, was shocked by some of the things he saw in a part of the world that now lies between Mali and Ghana. In Iwaltan, not far from Timbuktu, Ibn Battuta befriended the Muslim qadi, who held an important civic office there.

Ibn Battuta records his disgust with the social behavior in the qadi's family:

> One day I went into the presence of the qadi of Iwaltan, after asking his permission to enter, and found with him a young and a remarkably beautiful woman. When I saw her I hesitated and wished to withdraw, but she laughed at me and experienced no shyness. The qadi said to me: "Why are you turning back? She is my friend." I was amazed at their behaviour.[1]

But the qadi was not the only one who shocked Ibn Battuta, and he was particularly censorious of Abu Muhammad Yandakan al-Musufi, who was a good Muslim and had earlier on actually visited Morocco himself. When Ibn Battuta visited him at his house, he found a woman conversing with a man seated on a couch. Ibn Battuta reports:

> I said to him: "Who is this woman?" He said: "She is my wife." I said: "What connection has the man with her?" He replied: "He is her friend." I said to him: "Do you acquiesce in this when you have lived in our country and become acquainted with the precepts of the Shariah?" He replied: "The association of women with men is agreeable to us and a part of good conduct, to which no suspicion attaches. They are not like the women of your country." I was astonished at his laxity. I left him and did not return thereafter. He invited me several times, but I did not accept.[2]

Note that Abu Muhammad's difference from Ibn Battuta does not lie in religion—they were both Muslim—but in their decision about right lifestyles.

Muslim Tolerance and Diversity

I turn now to a more political issue. Varying attitudes to religious tolerance have often been socially important in the history of the world, and much variation can be found in this respect among different persons all of whom are Muslim by religion. For example, Emperor Aurangzeb, who ascended to the Mughal throne in India in the late seventeenth century, is generally regarded as being rather intolerant; he even imposed special taxes on his non-Muslim subjects. And yet a very different attitude can be seen in the life and behavior of his elder brother Dara Shikoh, the eldest son (and legitimate heir) of Emperor Shah Jahan, and of Mumtaz Mahal, in whose memory the Taj Mahal would be built. Aurangzeb killed Dara to grab the throne. Dara was not only a student of Sanskrit and serious scholar in the study of Hinduism, it is his Persian translation, from Sanskrit, of the Hindu *Upanishads* which was for a century or more one of the main foundations of European interest in Hindu religious philosophy.

Dara and Aurangzeb's great-grandfather, Akbar, was extremely supportive of religious tolerance (as was discussed earlier), and he made it a recognized duty of the state to make sure that "no man should be interfered with on account of religion, and anyone is to be allowed to go over to a religion that pleases him." In line with his pursuit of what he called "the path of reason" (*rahi aql*), Akbar insisted in the 1590s on the need for open dialogue and free choice, and also arranged recurrent discussions involving not only mainstream Muslim and Hindu thinkers, but also Christians, Jews, Parsees, Jains, and even atheists.[3] Aside from Dara, Aurangzeb's own son, also called Akbar, rebelled against his father, and joined hands in this enterprise with the Hindu kingdoms in Rajasthan and later the Hindu Marathas (though Akbar's rebellion was ultimately crushed by Aurangzeb). While fighting from Rajasthan, Akbar wrote to his father protesting at his intolerance and vilification of his Hindu friends.[4]

Faced with such diversity among Muslims, those who can see no distinction between being a Muslim and having an Islamic identity would be tempted to ask: "Which is the correct view according to Islam? Is Islam in favor of such tolerance, or is it not? Which is it really?" The prior issue to be faced here is not what the right answer to this question is, but whether the question itself is the right one to ask. Being a Muslim is not an overarching identity that determines everything in which a person believes. For example, Emperor Akbar's tolerance and heterodoxy had supporters as well as detractors among the influential Muslim groups in Agra and Delhi in sixteenth-century India. Indeed, he faced considerable opposition from Muslim clerics. Yet when Akbar died in 1605, the Islamic theologian Abdul Haq, who was sharply critical of many of Akbar's tolerant beliefs, had to conclude that despite his "innovations," Akbar had remained a good Muslim.[5]

The point to recognize is that in dealing with this discrepancy, it is not necessary to establish that either Akbar or Aurangzeb was not a proper Muslim. They could both have been fine Muslims without sharing the same political attitudes or social and cultural identities. It is possible for one Muslim to take an intolerant view and another to be very tolerant of heterodoxy without either of them ceasing to be a Muslim for that reason. This is not only because the idea of *ijtehad*, or religious interpretation, allows considerable latitude within Islam itself, but also because an individual Muslim has much freedom to determine what other values and priorities he or she would choose without compromising a basic Islamic faith.

Nonreligious Concerns and Diverse Priorities

Given the present disaffection between Arab and Jewish politics, it is also worth remembering that there is a long history of mutual respect between the two groups. It was mentioned in the first chapter that when the Jewish philosopher Maimonides was forced to emigrate from an intolerant Europe in the twelfth century, he found a tolerant refuge in the Arab world. His host, who gave him an honored and influential position in his court in Cairo, was none other than Emperor Saladin, whose Muslim credentials can hardly be doubted, given his valiant role in the Crusades in fighting for Islam (Richard the Lionheart was one of his distinguished opponents).

Maimonides' experience was not, in fact, exceptional. Indeed, even though the contemporary world is full of examples of conflicts between Muslims and Jews, Muslim rulers in the Arab world and in medieval Spain had a long history of trying to integrate Jews as secure members of the social community whose liberties—and sometimes leadership roles—were respected. For instance, as María Rosa Menocal has noted in her book *The Ornament of the World*, by the tenth century the achievement of Córdoba in Muslim-ruled Spain in being "as serious a contender as Baghdad, perhaps more so, for the title of most civilized place on earth" was due to the constructive influence of the joint work of Caliph Abd al-Rahman III and his Jewish vizier, Hasdai ibn Shaprut.[6] Indeed, there is considerable evidence, as Menocal argues, that the position of Jews after the Muslim conquest "was in every respect an improvement, as they went from persecuted to protected minority."[7]

Our religious or civilizational identity may well be very important, but it is one membership among many. The question we have to ask is not whether Islam (or Hinduism or Christianity) is a

peace-loving religion or a combative one ("tell us which it is really?"), but how a religious Muslim (or Hindu or Christian) may combine his or her religious beliefs or practices with other features of personal identity and other commitments and values (such as attitudes to peace and war). To see one's religious—or "civilizational"—affiliation as an all-engulfing identity would be a deeply problematic diagnosis.

There have been fierce warriors as well as great champions of peace among devoted members of each religion, and rather than asking which one is the "true believer" and which one a "mere impostor," we should accept that one's religious faith does not in itself resolve all the decisions we have to make in our lives, including those concerning our political and social priorities and the corresponding issues of conduct and action. Both the proponents of peace and tolerance and the patrons of war and intolerance can belong to the same religion, and may be (in their own ways) true believers, without this being seen as a contradiction. The domain of one's religious identity does not vanquish all other aspects of one's understanding and affiliation.

If being a Muslim were the only identity of anyone who happens to be Muslim, then of course that religious identification would have to carry the huge burden of resolving a great many other choices a person faces in other parts of his or her life. But being Islamic can hardly be the only identity a Muslim has. Indeed, the denial of plurality as well as the rejection of choice in matters of identity can produce an astonishingly narrow and misdirected view. Even the current divisions around the events of September 11 have placed Muslims on all sides of the dividing lines, and instead of asking which is the right Islamic position, we have to recognize that a Muslim can choose among several different positions on matters involving political, moral, and social judgments without ceasing to be, for that reason, a Muslim.

Mathematics, Science, and Intellectual History

There have been many discussions of the fact that a great many Muslims died in the World Trade Center on 9/11. As persons working there, they did not evidently regard that to be an evil expression of Western civilization. The World Trade Center did, of course, have symbolic significance, with its massive height and advanced technology (using the new tubular concept of structural engineering), and could be seen—in politically bellicose eyes—as an expression of Western audacity. It is interesting, in this context, to recall that the principal engineer behind the tubular concept was Fazlur Rahman Khan, the Chicago-based engineer from Bangladesh, who did the basic work underlying the innovation and later on also designed several other tall buildings, such as the 110-story Sears Tower and the 100-story John Hancock Center in Chicago, and also the Hajj Terminal in Jeddah in Saudi Arabia. As it happens, he also fought for Bangladesh's independence from Pakistan in 1971 and wrote a very readable Bengali book on that war. The fact that Muslims are on different sides of many cultural and political divides should not be at all surprising if it is recognized that being a Muslim is not an all-engulfing identity.

It is also important to recognize that many intellectual contributions of Muslims which made a major difference to global knowledge were not in any sense purely Islamic contributions. Even today, when a modern mathematician at MIT or Princeton or Stanford invokes an "algorithm" to solve a difficult computational problem, she helps to commemorate the contributions of the ninth-century Arab mathematician al-Khwarizmi, from whose name the term "algorithm" is derived (the term "algebra" comes from his book *Al-Jabr wa al-Muqabalah*). Many other major developments in the history of mathematics, science, and technology were carried out by the Muslim intelligentsia.

Many of these developments reached Europe only at the beginning of the second millennium, when translations from Arabic to Latin became quite common. However, some influences on Europe came earlier through the Muslim rulers of Spain. To consider one example of technological advance, Muslim engineers, both Arab and Berber, were responsible for the development and use of the technology of irrigation in the form of *acequias* in Spain, drawing on the innovations they had introduced earlier in the dry lands in the Middle East. This allowed, more than a thousand years ago, the cultivation of crops, fruits and vegetables, and the pasturing of animals on what had earlier been completely dry European land. Indeed, Muslim technologists were in charge of this admirable technical job over many centuries.[8]

Furthermore, Muslim mathematicians and scientists had a significant role in the globalization of technical knowledge through the movement of ideas across the Old World. For example, the decimal system and some early results in trigonometry went from India to Europe in the early years of the second millennium, transmitted through the works of Arab and Iranian mathematicians. Also, the Latin versions of the mathematical results of Indian mathematicians Aryabhata, Varahamihira, and Brahmagupta, from their Sanskrit treatises produced between the fifth and seventh centuries, appeared in Europe through two distinct steps, going first from Sanskrit to Arabic and then to Latin (I shall return to such multicultural transmissions in chapter 7). As leaders of innovative thought in that period in history, Muslim intellectuals were among the most committed globalizers of science and mathematics. The religion of the people involved, whether Muslim or Hindu or Christian, made little difference to

the scholarly commitments of these Muslim leaders of mathematics or science.

Similarly, many of the Western classics, particularly from ancient Greece, survived only through their Arabic translations, to be retranslated, mostly into Latin, in the early centuries of the second millennium, preceding the European Renaissance. The Arabic translations were originally made not, obviously, for preservation, but for contemporary use in the Arabic-speaking world—a world of some considerable expanse at the turn of the first millennium. But the global as well as domestic consequences that ultimately resulted from this process are entirely in line with what could be expected from the reach and catholicity of the scholarship of those who were leaders of world thought over those decisive centuries.

Plural Identities and Contemporary Politics

There are several reasons for which it is critically important today to pay attention to the distinction between (1) seeing Muslim people exclusively—or predominantly—in terms of their Islamic religion and (2) understanding them more broadly in terms of their many affiliations, which would certainly include their Islamic identity, but which need not crowd out the commitments that follow from their scientific interests, professional obligations, literary involvements, or political affiliations.

The first reason, of course, is the value of knowledge—the importance of knowing what is happening. Clarity of understanding has significance on its own, and can also have far-reaching consequences for thoughts and actions. For example, even when a gang of activists claim that their terrorist pursuits are particularly ordained by Islamic injunctions, thereby trying to extend radically the reach of religious commands, we can certainly question whether that is indeed the case. It would be an obvious and gross mistake to go along with their failure to see the distinction between an Islamic identity and the identity of being a dedicated terrorist in what they see as the cause of Islam. To see this distinction does not, of course, foreclose the intellectual possibility of debating whether Islamic injunctions can be interpreted in this way, but the debate cannot even begin if the very distinction between an Islamic identity and a Muslim person's many identities were entirely missed.

As it happens, most Muslim scholars would entirely reject the claim that Islamic injunctions can require or sanction or even tolerate terrorism, even though many of them would also argue, as will be discussed presently, that a person would not cease to be a Muslim even if he were to interpret his duties differently (in the view of their critics, mistakenly) so long as he adhered to the core Islamic beliefs and practices. The first issue, however, is not to confuse the role of a particular religious identity and the various priorities a person of that particular religion may choose to have (for a variety of other reasons).

Second, the distinction is of significance in the battle against the politicization of religion, exemplified not only by the rapid growth of political Islam, but also by the vigor with which the politicization of other religions have proceeded (exemplified by the political reach of "born-again" Christianity, or of Jewish extremism, or of the Hindutva movement). The world of practice—indeed sometimes very nasty and brutally sectarian practice—is systematically fed by the confusion between having a religion and ignoring the need for reasoning—and for freedom of thought—in deciding on matters that need not be "locked up" by religious faith. The process of misbegotten politicization can be seen, to varying

extents, in the increasingly polarized world, and it can vary from contributing directly to recruitment for active terrorism to enhancing vulnerability to such recruitment or encouraging tolerance of violence in the name of religion.

For example, the "creeping Shariah-ization of Indonesia," which the Indonesian Muslim scholar Syafi'i Anwar has described with much alarm, not only is a development of religious practice, but involves the spread of a particularly pugnacious social and political perspective in a traditionally tolerant—and richly multicultural—country.[9] A similar thing can be said about a number of other countries, including Malaysia, which have experienced a rapid promotion of a confrontational culture in the name of Islam, despite their history of cultural diversity and political breadth. To resist political polarization, this foundational distinction has to be pressed, since the exploitation of a religious (in this case, Islamic) identity is such a big part of the cultivation of organized conflicts of this kind.[10]

Third, the distinction allows us to understand more fully what is going on internally in countries that are placed by outsiders in some religious box, such as the so-called Islamic world, as if that identification could comprehensively explain current intellectual developments there. It is important to recognize that many countries that are formally Islamic states have ongoing political struggles in which many of the protagonists, even when they are devout Muslims by religion, do not draw their arguments only from their Islamic identity.

Consider Pakistan, which is certainly an Islamic state, and has Islam as its state religion with various political implications (for example, a non-Muslim could not be elected president of the country no matter how many votes he or she could get). And yet the civil society in that intellectually active country makes room for many commitments and pursuits that are not derived primarily—or at all—from religion. For example, Pakistan has a dedicated, and in many ways highly successful, Human Rights Commission, which appeals not just to Islamic entitlements but also to more broadly defined human rights. Even though, unlike the Human Rights Commission of India or South Africa, which are recognized bodies with legal power, the commission in Pakistan has no legal or constitutional standing (indeed it is formally no more than an NGO), yet under the stewardship of visionary leaders of civil society such as Asma Jahangir and I. A. Rehman, it has done much to fight for the freedoms of women, minorities, and other threatened people. Its qualified success has been based on the use of Pakistan's civil laws (to the extent that they have not been maimed by extremist reform), the courage and commitment of civil dissidents, the fair-mindedness of many upright members of the judiciary, the presence of a large body of socially progressive public opinion, and, last but not least, the effectiveness of the media in drawing attention to inhumanity and violation of civil decency. In fact, Pakistan's media, like the Bangladeshi press, has also been very active in directly investigating and prominently reporting cases of abuse and in raising humane—and often secular—issues for the attention of a reflective public.[11]

These recognitions do not reduce in any way the need to deal with "the depths of Pakistan's problem with Islamic extremism," as Husain Haqqani, a former Pakistani ambassador to Sri Lanka, has put it. It is critically important to pay attention to the diagnosis Haqqani has presented persuasively that "the disproportionate influence wielded by fundamentalist groups in Pakistan is the result of state sponsorship of such groups," and to his warning that "an environment dominated by Islamist and militarist ideologies is the ideal breeding ground for radicals and exportable radicalism."[12] These issues have to be addressed at different levels, and call for the reforming of governance and the military, the pressing

for democratic rights, giving more freedom of operation to the nonreligious and nonextremist political parties, and dealing with training grounds and fundamentalist schools that incline students toward confrontation and militancy. But attention must also be paid to the ongoing struggle within Pakistan in which its strong intellectual community has been playing a valuable, often visionary, role. Indeed, Husain Haqqani's own penetrating analysis is part of this richly constructive movement. The American-led "war on terror" has been so preoccupied with military moves, interstate diplomacy, intergovernment dialogues, and working with rulers in general (across the world, not just in Pakistan) that there has tended to be a serious neglect of the importance of civil society, despite the critically important work that it does in very difficult circumstances.

Indeed, humanist pursuits of broad reach have a rich history in Pakistan, and this tradition deserves celebration and support. It has already produced much-admired results that have received global attention in other contexts. For example, the human development approach to understanding economic and social progress (judging progress not merely by the growth of gross national product but by the enhancement of people's living conditions) has been pioneered in the world by a Pakistani economist and former finance minister, Mahbub ul Haq.[13] The approach has been widely used internationally, including in Pakistan, to assess the deficiencies of public policies (the critique has often been blistering), and it still remains one of the mainstays of the United Nations' constructive efforts in economic and social development. It is important to recognize that A. Q. Khan's clandestine nuclear wares are not the only things Pakistan has exported abroad.

Momentous nondenominational contributions of this kind draw on the broad visions of the persons involved, not specifically on their religiosity. And yet this fact did not make Mahbub ul Haq any less of a Muslim. His faith in religion in its proper domain was strong, as I can confirm, having had the privilege of knowing him as a close friend (from our days together as undergraduates at Cambridge in the early 1950s to his sudden death in 1998). The distinction between the broad variety of commitments of Muslims and their narrowly defined Islamic identity in particular is extraordinarily important to understand.

The fourth reason for emphasizing the importance of this distinction is that it is significantly—and sometimes entirely—missed in some of the "battles against terrorism" that are currently being waged. This can, and I believe already does, have very counterproductive effects. For example, attempts to fight terrorism through recruiting religion "on one's side" has not only been quite ineffective, they also suffer, I would argue, from a serious conceptual disorientation. This subject clearly deserves a fuller discussion.

Fighting Terrorism and Understanding Identities

The confusion between the plural identities of Muslims and their Islamic identity in particular is not only a descriptive mistake, it has serious implications for policies for peace in the precarious world in which we live. There is a great deal of anxiety in the contemporary world about global conflicts and terrorism. This is as it should be, since the threats are real and the need to do something to overcome and subdue these dangers is urgent. The actions taken in recent years have included military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq. These are important subjects for public debate (I must confess that I have been totally skeptical of the

policies chosen by the coalition partners for the Iraq operation in particular), but my focus here will be on another part of the global approach to conflicts and terrorism, involving public policies related to cultural relations and civil society.

As was discussed in the first chapter, this book is especially concerned with the conceptual framework within which these confrontations are seen and understood, and how the demands of public action are interpreted. A confusing role is played here by the reliance on a single categorization of the people of the world. The confusion adds to the flammability of the world in which we live. The problem I am referring to is much more subtle than the crude and abusive views that have been expressed about other cultures by people in the West, like the irrepressible Lieutenant General William Boykin of the U.S. Army (whose claim that the Christian God was "bigger than" the Islamic God was discussed in the first chapter). It is easy to see the obtuseness and inanity of views of this kind.

What, however, can be seen as a bigger and more general problem (despite the absence of the grossness of vilification) are the possibly terrible consequences of classifying people in terms of singular affiliations woven around exclusively religious identities. This is especially critical for understanding the nature and dynamics of global violence and terrorism in the contemporary world. The religious partitioning of the world produces a deeply misleading understanding of the people across the world and the diverse relations between them, and it also has the effect of magnifying one particular distinction between one person and another to the exclusion of all other important concerns.

In dealing with what is called "Islamic terrorism," there have been debates on whether being a Muslim demands some kind of strongly confrontational militancy, or whether, as many world

leaders have argued in a warm—and even inspiring—way, a "true Muslim" must be a tolerant individual. The denial of the necessity of a confrontational reading of Islam is certainly appropriate and extremely important today, and Tony Blair in particular deserves much applause for what he has done in this respect. But in the context of Blair's frequent invoking of "the moderate and true voice of Islam," we have to ask whether it is at all possible—or necessary—to define a "true Muslim" in terms of political and social beliefs about confrontation and tolerance, on which different Muslims have historically taken, as was discussed earlier, very different positions. The effect of this religion-centered political approach, and of the institutional policies it has generated (with frequent announcements of the kind, to cite one example, "the government is meeting Muslim leaders in the next vital stage designed to cement a united front"), has been to bolster and strengthen the voice of religious authorities while downgrading the importance of nonreligious institutions and movements.

The difficulty with acting on the presumption of a singular identity—that of religion—is not, of course, a special problem applying only to Muslims. It would also apply to any attempt to understand the political views and social judgments of people who happen to be Christian, or Jewish, or Hindu, or Sikh, by relying mainly—or only—on what their alleged religious leaders declare as spokesmen for their "flocks." The singular classification gives a commanding voice to the "establishment" figures in the respective religious hierarchy while other perspectives are relatively downgraded and eclipsed.

There is concern—and some astonishment—today that despite attempts to bring in the religious establishment of Muslims and other non-Christian groups into dialogues about global peace and local calm, religious fundamentalism and militant

recruitment have continued to flourish even in Western countries. And yet this should not have come as a surprise. Trying to recruit religious leaders and clerics in support of political causes, along with trying to redefine the religions involved in terms of political and social attitudes, downplays the significance of nonreligious values people can and do have in their appropriate domain, whether or not they are religious.

The efforts to recruit the mullahs and the clergy to play a role outside the immediate province of religion could, of course, make some difference in what is preached in mosques or temples. But it also downgrades the civic initiatives people who happen to be Muslim by religion can and do undertake (along with others) to deal with what are essentially political and social problems. Further, it also heightens the sense of distance between members of different religious communities by playing up their religious differences in particular, often at the cost of other identities (including that of being a citizen of the country in question), which could have had a more uniting role. Should a British citizen who happens to be Muslim have to rely on clerics or other leaders of the religious community to communicate with the prime minister of his country, who has been particularly keen to speak through the religious leaders?

It should not be so surprising that the overlooking of all the identities of people other than those connected with religion can prove to be a problematic way of trying to reduce the hold of religious sectarianism. This problem also arises sharply in dealing with the more difficult—and more turbulent—political situation in battle-torn Iraq and Afghanistan. The elections and referendum in Iraq in 2005 can be seen as a considerable success within their own criteria of assessment: the elections did occur, a fairly high proportion of the electorate did vote, and violent interruptions did

not mar the entire effort. And yet in the absence of opportunities for open and participatory dialogue beyond what was provided by religious institutions, the voting process was predictably sectarian, linked with religious and ethnic denominations. The participation of people from different denominations (Shia, Sunni, Kurd) seemed to be rigidly intermediated by the spokesmen for the respective denominations, with the general citizenship roles of those people being given little opportunity to develop and flourish.

Despite many achievements of the Karzai government in Kabul (certainly much has been accomplished), there is a somewhat similar, if less intense, problem in Afghanistan as well, with the attempted reliance in official policy on gatherings of tribal leaders and councils of clerics, rather than on the more exacting, but critically important, cultivation of open general dialogues and interactions that could go beyond religious politics. To see religious affiliation as an all-engulfing identity can take a considerable political toll. Given the tremendous challenges the Afghan leadership faces, it is necessary to be patient with the approaches it is trying out, but the likely long-run difficulties of taking this narrow route have to be articulated without compromising the admiration for what the Karzai government has achieved.

As for the global challenge of terrorism, we have reason to expect, from the world leaders working against it, rather greater clarity of thought than we are currently getting. The confusion generated by an implicit belief in the solitarist understanding of identity poses serious barriers to overcoming global terrorism and creating a world without ideologically organized large-scale violence. The recognition of multiple identities and of the world beyond religious affiliations, even for very religious people, can possibly make some difference in the troubled world in which we live.

Terrorism and Religion

I was privileged to know Daniel Pearl a little. He came to a talk of mine in Paris in the summer of 2000, and we had a longish conversation afterward. He knew then that he was soon going to be based in Bombay (or Mumbai, as it is now called), reporting for the *Wall Street Journal* on the subcontinent. Later, early in February 2001, I saw him again in Bombay, and I had the opportunity of continuing our conversation. I was struck not only by Pearl's remarkable intelligence, but also by his commitment to pursue the truth and, through that means, to help create a better—and less unjust—world. We also discussed, particularly during our first meeting, how violence in the world is often sown by ignorance and confusion, as well as by injustices that receive little attention. I was moved, intellectually as well as emotionally, by Daniel Pearl's dedication to fight for peace and justice through the advancement of understanding and enlightenment. It was that dedication to investigate and explore that would ultimately cost him his life, when the terrorists would capture and execute him in Pakistan the year after I last met him.

Daniel's father, Judea Pearl, who is the president of the Daniel Pearl Foundation, which is dedicated to intercultural understanding, recently expressed his frustration in a moving—and also enlightening—article about the outcome of an important meeting of Muslim scholars in Amman in Jordan. The conference, to which 170 Islamic clerics and experts had come from forty countries, tried to define "the reality of Islam and its role in the contemporary society." The final communiqué of the Amman conference, issued on July 6, 2005, stated categorically: "It is not possible to declare as apostates any group of Muslims who believes in Allah the Mighty and Sublime and His Messenger

(may Peace and Blessings be upon him) and the pillars of faith, and respects the pillars of Islam and does not deny any necessary article of religion."[14] Judea Pearl felt disappointed, though he is too gentle and tolerant to express anger, with the conclusion that "belief in basic tenets of faith provides an immutable protection from charges of apostasy." He points out that this implies that "bin Laden, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and the murderers of Daniel Pearl and Nick Berg will remain bona fide members of the Muslim faith, as long as they do not explicitly renounce it."

Judea Pearl's disappointment reflected a hope he had clearly entertained that the horrible acts of terror would not only receive denunciation from Muslim scholars (which they, in fact, did, in no uncertain terms), but would also be a sufficient ground for religious excommunication. But no excommunication occurred, and given the way the demands of being a Muslim are foundationally defined in Islam, it could not have. In Judea Pearl's case, the personal disappointment is entirely natural, but when the same expectation is used in the strategy of fighting terrorism at the global level, it can legitimately be asked whether Western strategists have good reason to expect that a religion itself can be recruited to fight terrorism through declaring the terrorists to be apostates. That expectation was dashed in Amman, but was it a reasonable expectation for strategists to entertain?

As was discussed earlier, we have to ask whether it is at all possible to define a "true Muslim" in terms of beliefs about confrontation and tolerance, on which Islam does not dictate and on which different Muslims have taken widely different positions over many centuries. This freedom allowed, of course, King Abdullah II of Jordan to firmly assert, as he did during the very same conference, that "the acts of violence and terrorism carried out by certain extremist groups in the name of Islam are utterly contradictory to the principles and ideology of Islam." But that diagnosis—and

indeed reprimand—still does not take us to a position by which the persons thus criticized must be seen as "apostate," and it is that central point that the Amman declaration by Muslim scholars affirmed. Apostasy is a matter of basic religious belief and specified practice; it is not a matter of the correctness in interpreting social or political principles, or of the rightness of civil society, or even of identifying what most Muslims would see as terrible civil conduct or abominable political behavior.

Richness of Muslim Identities

If a Muslim person's only identity were that of being Islamic, then of course all moral and political judgments of the person would have to be specifically linked with religious assessment. It is that solitarist illusion that underlies the Western—particularly Anglo-American—attempt to recruit Islam in the so-called war against terrorism.[15] The unwillingness to distinguish between (1) a Muslim person's variety of associations and affiliations (these can vary widely from person to person) and (2) his or her Islamic identity in particular has tended to tempt Western leaders to fight political battles against terrorism through the exotic route of defining—or redefining—Islam. What needs to be recognized is not only that this solitarist approach has accomplished little so far, but also that it cannot really be expected to achieve much given the distinction between religious issues, on the one hand, and other matters on which Muslims, no matter how religious, have to take their own decisions. Even though the borderline between the two domains may be hard to delineate, the domain of religious excommunication and apostasy cannot be extended much beyond the well-established central tenets of Islamic

canons and identified practice. Religion is not, and cannot be, a person's all-encompassing identity.[16]

It is, of course, true that the so-called Islamic terrorists have repeatedly tried to extend the role of religion very far into other spheres, contrary (as King Abdullah rightly noted) to the generally accepted principles and domain of Islam. It is also true that the recruiters for terrorism would like Muslims to forget that they have other identities too and that they have to decide on many important political and moral matters and take responsibility for their decisions, rather than being led by the recruiters' advocacy based on their uncommon reading of Islam. The mistaken presumptions involved in such efforts can certainly be scrutinized and criticized. But the strategy of trying to stop such recruitment by declaring the recruiters to be "apostate" would also—I fear in a somewhat singularist way—extend the reach of religion beyond its established domain.

The basic recognition of the multiplicity of identities would militate against trying to see people in exclusively religious terms, no matter how religious they are within the domain of religion. Attempts to tackle terrorism through the aid of religion has had the effect of magnifying in Britain and America the voice of Islamic clerics and other members of the religious establishment on matters that are not in the domain of religion, at a time when the political and social roles of Muslims in civil society, including in the practice of democracy, need emphasis and much greater support. What religious extremism has done to demote and downgrade the responsible political action of citizens (irrespective of religious ethnicity) has been, to some extent, reinforced, rather than eradicated, by the attempt to fight terrorism by trying to recruit the religious establishment on "the right side." In the downplaying of political and social identities as opposed to religious identity, it is civil society that has been the loser, precisely at a time when there is a great need to strengthen it.

9. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. George Lawrence (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1990), p. 1.
10. Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1994), p. 21.
11. The significance of printing for public reasoning is discussed in my book *The Argumentative Indian*, pp. 82–83, 182–84.

CHAPTER 4.
Religious Affiliations and Muslim History

1. *Corpus of Early Arabic Sources for West African History*, trans. J. F. P. Hopkins, edited and annotated by N. Levtzion and J. F. P. Hopkins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 285. See also *Ibn Battuta: Travels in Asia and Africa 1325–1354*, trans. H. A. R. Gibbs (London: Routledge, 1929), p. 321.
2. *Corpus of Early Arabic Sources for West African History*, p. 286; "Shariah" has been substituted here for Hopkins's abbreviated form "Shar'."
3. See Pushpa Prasad, "Akbar and the Jains," in Irfan Habib, ed., *Akbar and His India* (Delhi and New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 97–98.
4. The father of the Maratha king, Raja Sambhaji, whom the young Akbar had joined, was none other than Shivaji, whom the present-day Hindu political activists treat as a superhero, and after whom the intolerant Hindu party Shiv Sena is named (though Shivaji himself was quite tolerant, as the Mughal historian Khafi Khan, who was no admirer of Shivaji in other respects, reported).
5. See Iqtidar Alam Khan, "Akbar's Personality Traits and World Outlook: A Critical Reappraisal," in Habib, ed., *Akbar and His India*, p. 78.
6. María Rosa Menocal, *The Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews, and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain* (New York: Little, Brown, 2002), p. 86.
7. Ibid., p. 85.
8. See Harry Eyres, "Civilization Is a Tree with Many Roots," *Financial Times*, July 23, 2005. As Jan Reed has noted, "Moorish irrigation works, later much extended, remain the basis for agriculture in the parched and dried regions of Spain and Portugal" (*The Moors in Spain and Portugal* [London: Faber & Faber, 1974], p. 235).
9. Reported by Michael Vatikiotis, "Islamizing Indonesia," *International Herald Tribune*, September 3–4, 2005, p. 5. See also Vatikiotis's "The Struggle for Islam," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, December 11, 2003, and M. Syafi'i Anwar, "Pluralism and Multiculturalism in Southeast Asia: Formulating Educational Agendas and Programs," *ICIP Journal* 2 (January 2005).
10. There is also the related issue of how Islam should be interpreted in social and political contexts, including the need for a breadth of interpretation, on which see Ayesha Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam Since 1850* (London: Routledge, 2000). See also Gilles Kepel, *The War for Muslim Minds: Islam and the West* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004).

11. The growing consolidation of a vigorous and largely independent media in Pakistan, dependent on the commitments of courageous and farsighted journalists, is a significant positive development for peace and justice in Pakistan that deserves much greater recognition than it tends to get outside the country. The tradition of reach and fearlessness established by such periodicals as the *Friday Times* (pioneered by the courageous and visionary Najam Sethi) and the *Herald*, and by dailies such as *The Dawn*, *The Nation*, the *Daily Times*, and the *News*, give reason for considerable hope for the future of the country. This would have pleased Faiz Ahmed Faiz, the great poet and distinguished early editor of the *Pakistan Times*, who worked hard for the development of an independent Pakistani media before it was blasted to bits by military rule and political extremism. He had to face incarceration, as did Najam Sethi later.
12. Husain Haqqani, "Terrorism Still Thrives in Pakistan," *International Herald Tribune*, July 20, 2005, p. 8. See also his insightful and informative book *Pakistan: Between Mosque and Military* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2005). Also Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: The Story of the Afghan Warlords* (London: Pan, 2001), and *Taliban: Islam, Oil and the New Great Game in Central Asia* (London: Tauris, 2002).
13. See the *Human Development Reports* published annually by the United Nations Development Programme, a project that was initiated, and for many years led, by Mahbub ul Haq. After Mahbub ul Haq's untimely death, this largely secular work has been carried out in Pakistan by an institute founded by him (which is now ably led by his widow, Khadija Haq).
14. Judea Pearl, "Islam Struggles to Stake Out Its Position," *International Herald Tribune*, July 20, 2005.
15. It is particularly relevant here to take note of the insightful distinction Mahmood Mamdani has presented with much clarity: "My aim is to question the widely held presumption . . . that extremist religious tendencies can be equated with political terrorism. Terrorism is not a necessary effect of religious tendencies, whether fundamentalist or secular. Rather, terrorism is born of political encounter" (*Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* [New York: Doubleday, 2004], pp. 61–62).
16. This is not to deny that the domain of Islamic tenets can be defined in somewhat different ways; see, for example, M. Syafi'i Anwar's distinction between the "legal-exclusive approach" and the "substantive-inclusive approach" in his paper "The Future of Islam, Democracy, and Authoritarianism in the Muslim World," *ICIP Journal* 2 (March 2005). But none of the variants can make religion a person's all-encompassing identity.