Portraits of Hope and Hardship

Syrian Television | Shadi Hamid on Islamic Exceptionalism | Dubai Economy
Al Noor, The Boston College Undergraduate Middle Eastern Studies Journal, aims to: ✦ Facilitate a nonpartisan, unbiased conversation within the Boston College community and beyond about the Middle East. ✦ Provide a medium for students to publish research on the Middle East and Islam. ✦ Promote diverse opinions and present a comprehensive view of the myriad of cultures, histories, and perspectives that comprise the Middle East. ✦ Be considerate of the complexity of the region while pursuing the utmost objectivity.
EDITORIAL STAFF

EDITORS-IN-CHIEF
Catherine Cole ’17
Hagop Toghadjadjian ’17

MANAGING EDITOR
Thomas Toghadjadjian ’19

EDITORS
Victory Adikema ’20
Natasha Bednarz ’17
Lilah Butler ’20
Kyle Costa ’19
Matthew Gruza ’19
Justin Hsieh ’19
Trevor R. Jones ’20
McKenna Madden ’20
Reed Piercey ’19
Jaq Pyle ’20
Rebecca Reilly ’19
Leena Rijhwani ’20
Jess Zettlemoyer ’19
Echo Zhuge ’20

The information provided by our contributors is not independently verified by Al Noor. The materials presented represent the personal opinions of the individual authors and do not necessarily represent the views of Al Noor or the Boston College community.

The contents of this journal were developed under a grant from the Undergraduate International Studies and Foreign Language (UISFL) Program, U.S. Department of Education. However, the contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and should not be assumed as an endorsement by the Federal Government of the United States.

Al Noor, The Boston College Middle Eastern Studies Journal, Volume 10, Issue 1, Autumn 2016

Copyright © 2016 by Trustees of Boston College
Printing: Universal Wilde, Westwood, MA

Funding for this publication is provided by the Institute for Liberal Arts at Boston College.

ADVISORY BOARD

Kathleen Bailey, adjunct associate professor of political science and associate director of the Islamic Civilization and Societies Program
Ali Banuazizi, professor of political science and director of the Islamic Civilization and Societies Program
Nasser Behnegar, associate professor of political science
Sheila Blair, Norma Jean Calderwood co-chair of Islamic and Asian art
Jonathan Bloom, Norma Jean Calderwood co-chair of Islamic and Asian art
David DiPasquale, professor in political science and Islamic Civilization and Societies
Ann Lucas, assistant professor of ethnomusicology
James Morris, professor of theology
Dana Sajdi, assistant professor of history
Franck Salameh, assistant professor of Near Eastern studies

THANKS

Special thanks to those who helped to make this publication possible:
David Quiqley, provost and dean of faculties
Ben Birnbaum, editor of Boston College Magazine and special assistant to the president of the University
Mary Crane, Thomas F. Rattigan professor of English and director of the Institute for Liberal Arts
Peter Marino, director of finance and administration for the Center for Centers
Susan Dunn, fiscal and operations administrator for the Center for Centers
Ana Berreondo, fiscal and events assistant for the Center for Centers

Visit us online at bcalnoor.org.
Mailing address: 10 Stone Avenue, Chestnut Hill, MA 02467
LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

It is our pleasure to release the milestone 10th volume of Al Noor. This is a landmark edition of a publication that has devoted itself from the beginning to “shedding light on an often-misunderstood region.” Today, the journal—whose name means “light” in Arabic, Hebrew, Turkish, and Farsi—continues its illuminating mission through a series of articles that confront misconceptions about the Middle East. For example:

✦ Muslim democracies such as Indonesia and Malaysia—often viewed as more secular than Muslim states in the Middle East—actually have implemented more Sharia ordinances than Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, or other Arab nations. (page 9)

✦ Anti-regime dissent was present, permitted, and at times even encouraged in pre-revolution Syria. (18)

✦ The emirate of Dubai derives far more wealth from tourism and retail than from oil production. (40)

These are just a few snapshots from this issue’s collection of essays, which are intended to challenge opinions, encourage discussion, and provoke debate.

In the issue’s feature interview, Al Noor engages Shadi Hamid in a discussion of his latest book, *Islamic Exceptionalism: How the Struggle Over Islam is Reshaping the World*. Our conversation grapples with a number of serious questions. Is the West able to take religion seriously? What distinguishes Muslim Americans from their non-Muslim counterparts? What mistakes have President Obama and President-elect Trump made in their approach to Islam and Muslims? By discussing these themes, we cut to the core of Hamid’s argument that Islam is “exceptional.”

In “Pop Culture and Political Critique in Syria: How Khan al-Harir Denounced State Cronyism and Authoritarianism Under the Assad Regime,” Austin Gray investigates one television show and its political significance for pre-war Syria. His analysis shows how dissidents creatively called regime narratives into question—and how the regime, surprisingly, let them.

In “Hope and Struggle in the Hashemite Kingdom,” A.J. Naddaf’s photos bring us face to face with the refugees, authors, mothers, and entrepreneurs who are creating the future in modern Jordan. Many of the individuals Naddaf profiled also chose to share anecdotes from their lives, and these stories are reproduced alongside his vibrant images.

In “The Dubai Shopping Festival: Diversification in the Emirati Economy,” Anna Hess traces Dubai’s metamorphosis from an underdeveloped port into a global economic powerhouse built upon a foundation of industry, retail, and tourism. Hess uses Dubai’s signal retail event, its Shopping Festival, to explore how one modern Arab economy is changing and innovating.

In “Sunni Islam’s Internal Ethnic Conflict: The Cognitive Dissonance Between Universal Faith and Ethnic Origin,” Dr. Patrick James Christian explores Islam’s roots in the society of seventh-century Arabia. His essay analyzes the divide between desert nomads and oasis-dwellers, arguing that this divide is at the core of Muslim identity and continues to cause tension today.

Beyond the work highlighted in this issue, we invite you to explore our website, [bcalnoor.org](http://bcalnoor.org), where you can view a complete archive of our past articles, interviews, and photo essays. We also hope you visit our Facebook page (Al Noor Middle Eastern Studies Journal), which offers regular, up-to-date insight into current events relevant to the region.

Thank you for your interest in Al Noor—and, more importantly, thank you for taking the time to delve into some of the stories, events and ideas shaping the modern Middle East. We very much hope you enjoy this edition of the journal. As always, comments, questions and suggestions are welcome at [eic@alnoorjournal.org](mailto:eic@alnoorjournal.org).

Catherine Cole ’17
Hagop Toghramadjian ’17
EDITORS-IN-CHIEF
# Table of Contents

6 Islamic Exceptionalism
   **AN INTERVIEW WITH SHADI HAMID**
   by the Al Noor Staff

14 Pop Culture and Political Critique in Syria
   **HOW KHAN AL-HARIR DENOUNCED STATE CRONYISM AND AUTHORITARIANISM UNDER THE ASSAD REGIME**
   by Austin E. Gray

26 Hope and Struggle in the Hashemite Kingdom
   **PORTRAITS OF JORDAN**
   by AJ Naddaff
38 The Dubai Shopping Festival
DIVERSIFICATION IN THE EMIRATI ECONOMY
by Anna Hess

48 Sunni Islam’s Internal Ethnic Conflict
THE COGNITIVE DISSONANCE BETWEEN UNIVERSAL FAITH AND ETHNIC ORIGINATION
by Dr. Patrick James Christian
Islamic Exceptionalism

An Interview with Shadi Hamid

Al Noor Staff

A contributing writer at The Atlantic and a Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution, Shadi Hamid is also the author of two widely acclaimed books. Temptations of Power: Islamists and Illiberal Democracy in a New Middle East was named a Foreign Affairs best book of 2014, and Islamic Exceptionalism: How the Struggle Over Islam is Reshaping the World was released in 2016. Prior to joining the Brookings Institution, he received a doctoral degree from Oxford University, where he was a Marshall scholar. He also served as a specialist in public diplomacy for the State Department, and received a Fulbright fellowship to study Islamist participation in Jordanian politics.
In the past half-decade, Shadi Hamid has established himself as one of America’s leading experts on Middle Eastern politics, political Islam, and democratization. Bolstered by an impeccable academic pedigree, including degrees from Georgetown University, a stint as a Fulbright scholar, and a PhD from Oxford, his knowledge of Islamist politics is almost unrivaled. His knack for formulating his insights in a lucid, accessible style is well known to readers of The Atlantic, where he is a contributing writer; his articles have also appeared in The Washington Post, The Christian Science Monitor, and The New Republic, among other publications. Hamid is very much at home in today’s media environment, regularly taking to Twitter or Reddit to defend his positions. He puts his singular mix of scholarly skill and communicative ability on full display in his latest book, Islamic Exceptionalism: How the Struggle Over Islam is Reshaping
The World. Al Noor sat down with him in October 2016 to explore some of the issues discussed in his book.

A Conversation

In your words, why is Islam exceptional?

Shadi Hamid: All religions are different from each other, so it kind of goes without saying that Islam is different than Christianity and Christianity is different than Judaism. That’s a banal observation. What I’m saying here is something a little bit different, that Islam is exceptional in particular ways that have a profound impact on how we understand the Middle East and our world today. It’s not just an academic argument or intellectual exercise. It’s more like: what happened fourteen centuries ago really matters all this time later. In particular, Islam has proven to be resistant to secularization, and I would argue that will continue to be resistant to secularization. Part of what I want to do is challenge a broader issue in our culture, especially in the bastions of Northeastern elite liberalism, where a lot of us come from secular backgrounds. I think sometimes it can be hard for us to relate to the power of religion and what it means to people in their everyday lives in the Middle East and elsewhere in Muslim majority countries. I want to find a way to bring religion back into the conversation and to take it seriously as a factor, as a source of motivation, as something that causes other things instead of being a product of other factors. There is this argument that religion or religiosity is just the outcome of changes, like economic issues. People are poor, they’re angry, they’re looking for something to believe in, it’s a crutch: we are always looking for ways to explain religion away as if we can’t take it seriously on its own terms.

The other thing I will just say is I just don’t like this idea that we all have to be the same, that we all ultimately want the same things, and there’s just this basic trajectory that all of us are ultimately following. That it begins with the Reformation and the Enlightenment, and continues toward secularism and liberal democracy and “the end of history.” To think that we could sort of superimpose that framework on Islam and say, “Well, Christianity went through this, so Islam is going to go through it” is a way to skirt over our differences because we’re not comfortable with difference anymore. We’re scared of micro-aggressions and offending people. We don’t want to talk about difference. But maybe it’s better to acknowledge difference and then start from that premise, rather than pretending those differences don’t exist.

Religions have to mean something, so Islam can’t just be anything Muslims want it to be. Islam has to be something; there has to be some kind of core element. Otherwise what’s the point of religion? So if we think of it in terms of Christianity, Christianity without Christ might matter in a kind of cultural sense, but then Christianity is deprived of its theological content. If you just think Jesus is some ordinary guy, then what does it mean to be Christian theologically? At some point, there has to be something there for it to be meaningful. If you take away the idea that the Quran is God’s actual speech, which I think is a very distinctive element of Islam vis a vis Christianity, then the entire foundation of Islam falls apart. If you take that away, what would be the point?

A lot of academics have argued that Islam is different, but it’s not so different. They’ve rejected the idea that Islam is in conflict with Western-style democracy and have pointed to democracies like Indonesia or Senegal as proof. Their position is that the real outlier with

“We don’t want to talk about difference. But maybe it’s better to acknowledge difference and then start from that premise, rather than pretending those differences don’t exist.”
regard to democracy and liberalism is the Arab world. How do you address that argument?

SH: In the book I have a section whose heading is, “Is There an Arab Problem?” It kind of gets into the question of whether it is just about Arabs, if they’re the ones who are messed up. I think Indonesia and Malaysia are really interesting because we hail them as these models of relative democracy and pluralism, and we say, “Hey, this is the way it should be. This is the way to go.” But actually what you find is a little bit counterintuitive, that with more democracy in Indonesia, you don’t necessarily have more liberalism. There is more experimentation with the implementation of Sharia ordinances on the local level in Indonesia and Malaysia than in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Algeria… the list goes on. And we don’t even realize that because no one actually cares about Indonesia or Malaysia. They’re not of particular strategic importance, at least not now. So people don’t know about that.

But it makes logical sense. Ostensibly, they have secular ruling parties but because the broad population is religiously conservative—and also there’s decentralization—if you want to win in local regions, even though you might be a secular party, you still have to meet the median voter halfway. You have to learn to speak the language of religion. You have to talk about Sharia. You even have to talk about the *hudud*, religiously derived criminal punishments. In that sense, that’s really what democracy is about, it’s about being responsive to popular sentiment.

This gets to me to a concept which I call Islamism without Muslims, where you can actually have non-Islamists doing Islamism things. So it’s not just about Islamists. There is a broad agreement in many of these countries that Islam should play a prominent or a central role in public life. It’s no longer the province of one party against another; it’s sort of part of this broader cultural conservative consensus. And that helps because that means Islam is not going to be as much a source of polarization. Whereas on the other hand in Egypt, there’s essentially one mainstream Islamist movement, the Muslim Brotherhood, and that’s a locus or focal point of polarization. And then when the Brotherhood forms a political party and there’s only one political party that they form, then you’re sort of partisanizing or making partisan a broad-based religious movement. Whereas in Indonesia, for example, you have multiple Islamist parties and not just one major Islamist party.

*The relationship you’re talking about between Islam and liberal democracy is one of the most interesting parts of your book, because on the one hand you’re very firm that there’s no contradiction in being “American and Muslim” and that Islam isn’t incompatible with democracy, but on the other hand you suggest that it might not be compatible with liberal democracy and with liberalism. How do you reconcile Islam with the liberal aspects of American democracy?*

SH: I don’t know if I’d phrase my position in quite that way. I get a little nervous when I hear terms like compatible and incompatible; they sound very definitive to me. So what I would say is that Islam is in tension with classical liberalism—in tension. I think Muslim minorities in the West are a different issue, and I don’t want to give the impression that American Muslims can’t somehow be fully American because they are somehow intrinsically illiberal, and I wouldn’t want
people to draw that implication from my argument.

As a Muslim-American, you have a special perspective on this. How do you see the position of Islam developing in America in the future?

SH: Yeah, I mean, it’s something I’ve been thinking about more in light of the rise of Trump. And it’s also something more personal in that I am an American Muslim, so I guess I’m supposed to have something to say about that. But I think that to me the American model is an encouraging one, an inspiring one, and it’s more promising and constructive then the contexts in Europe, which I think are more problematic when it comes to the role of Muslim minorities. But I think what’s good about the US approach, if you will, is that you can be fully Muslim and fully American. There doesn’t have to be a contradiction because the US, from its founding moment, is more comfortable with public expressions of faith. That’s not something that’s necessarily frowned upon. It’s something that is part of the fabric of American society, so we don’t go around freaking out about Orthodox Jews and their communities in New York being a bad thing. We say that’s part of the American fabric. Or Christian evangelicals in the Bible Belt—that’s part of the American fabric. We’re not going to question whether Christian evangelicals are sufficiently American because they’re not necessarily secular. They’re just as American as anyone else.

So I think that that leaves open quite a bit of room for American Muslims who are more conservative. So if you have American Muslims who are more conservative in their practice they can be more conservative in their practice without necessarily being less American or having to go out of their way to justify themselves. So I think in that sense, that’s why the American approach to secularism is more constructive for communities or groups that are more culturally or religiously conservative. On the other hand, in a place like France, to be truly French, to be fully French, is to believe in French secularism, which doesn’t allow room for public expressions of faith. So if you’re a woman who’s wearing the headscarf, you could be born and raised in France and that’s all you know, but you’re not going to be viewed by many of your French counterparts as truly French, because you’re not reflecting a very basic part of French culture which is this kind of in-built suspicion of religion. So, that’s why I think that when Donald Trump talks about Islam being a problem or American Muslims being a problem, the implication being they don’t love their country as much or they’re not fully American, that’s really problematic because it seems like Trump is holding on to this idea of assimilation that to be fully American you have to give up your culture, religion, or traditions. So I don’t think assimilation should be the goal. Integration should be the goal, and when we start to hold assimilation as the standard—and it’s not evenly applied because he’s not saying that about Orthodox Jews; he’s just saying that about Muslims—that’s just not the kind of America that we have lived in traditionally, at least in our own idealized conception of it. At least we aspire to this idea of pluralism, that different communities can do things in different ways and we don’t all freak out about it. We’re not trying to homogenize American culture. We shouldn’t be trying to homogenize American culture.

A lot of what you’ve just focused has to do with things like wearing the headscarf publically or praying publicly. But in your book you discuss Islam’s unique insistence on Islamic law or political expression of the faith. Do you think that in the United States that’s sort of jettisoned, or do you think there’s still something intrinsic about Islam that demands a political expression and that US Muslims, if they were to be fully Islamic, would also demand?

SH: Okay, part of the problem here is that when we talk about Sharia, what are we really talking about? I think that there are a lot of misconceptions about what this word actually means. That gets to an aspect of Islam’s distinctiveness in that there simply is no equivalent in Christianity to Sharia, so it’s very hard for people sometimes to relate to it. Sharia is broader than just law. When we hear “law,” as Americans, we think about codified legislation. We think, “Oh, law! Article 123, or whatever,” and that’s not the best way to understand Sharia. You can’t find Sharia in a book. It’s not codified anywhere. So I think that’s one problem.
I think there's also an issue having to do with whether you're a minority versus a majority. If Muslims were a minority in the US, that would be a very interesting test case about how they would express, as a minority, their religious identity in public life. But this is something that will never happen in our lifetimes, so who cares? So I worry that we're just coming up with these very interesting hypotheticals. "What if Muslims conquered France?" There's actually a book by Michel Houellebecq, who imagines this parallel universe where there's a Muslim prime minister who's part of this Islamic party, and somehow they come to power in 2022. That's an interesting basis for a novel, but it's not real. I think that there's also something very fundamental in Islamic law that you respect the law of the land where you live. So regardless if people are comfortable—if it becomes the law, then you have to respect it.

Of course, you personally can object to that from a moral perspective, but someone should be able to object to a law from a moral perspective while still respecting that it happens to be the law of that land at a given time. So I think that's an important aspect of this. Just like Christian evangelicals are uncomfortable with many aspects of our legal culture and Supreme Court rulings on abortion or whatever else it might be, for the most part, they respect the law of the land. We all agree as Americans that when the Supreme Court makes a judgment, we're going to respect it, even if we think it's bad.

So, ultimately, US Muslims are distinctive in that—

**SH:** First of all, I don't know if I'd call US Muslims distinctive. This gets to another issue. I almost feel like there are certain aspects of my argument that I want to pull back from. When I hear you saying that US Muslims are distinctive, my instinctive reaction is to be like, "Wait! I'm not sure if I'm comfortable with how you've described my view." But maybe it is my view, and I'm just not comfortable with it. The same thing with "incompatible." I just wanted to push back. It's a controversial, provocative argument, and it can be misused easily, and I worry that if we start from the premise that US Muslims, as a group in the US, are distinctive, then where do people take that? What does that mean in practice? Distinctiveness isn't always seen as a positive thing. So that's why I wouldn't say that US Muslims are distinctive. My argument is always more that Islam is distinctive as a religious tradition, and then we can sort of debate what that means for Muslims as expressed in various contexts.

*Earlier, you mentioned that we run away from difference and we're afraid of difference. How should we discuss difference when it's a matter of individuals, of Muslims, not just their abstract faith tradition? Can we discuss distinctiveness in this way?*

**SH:** American Muslims, assuming they're believing Muslims—and there are people who are just sort of nominally or culturally Muslim, and that's a little bit different—but if we're talking about believing Muslims, then almost by definition, believing Muslims believe in something called Sharia, right? But not Sharia in the sense of *hudud* punishments and cutting off the hands of thieves, but in the broader sense that the Sharia speaks not just to public law but to private practice. So, if a Muslim wants to pray, they can't pray, they won't be able to pray, without Sharia. That's how Muslims know how to pray. That's part of the overall corpus of law and tradition. How do we know whether to pray like this or with our hands to our sides? That would probably depend on which school of law you

"I always hear this: ‘They’re using religion, but what they really care about is something else.’ Why not the other way around? Why can’t they be instrumentalizing power for religion?"
subscribe to: Malakis, Hanafis, et cetera. That’s part of Islamic law. In that sense, American Muslims believe in something, Sharia, which may seem foreign to non-Muslims. It’s hard for them to understand what that would really mean to an individual American Muslim. In that sense, there is that distinctiveness that we need to engage in the concept of Sharia.

One of the most interesting parts of your book discusses how, for many Muslims, the decline of the Abbasid Caliphate feels as fresh as if it were yesterday. It still feels very potent. How has this memory colored Muslim responses to the rise of the West and to Western hegemony? In what ways has it influenced the more radical responses?

SH: Well, Islamism couldn’t have existed in the pre-modern era. Even the word Islamism didn’t exist in the pre-modern era. Why would it have to exist? Islamism only makes sense in opposition to something else. Islamism is taking a slab of religion and saying that, “Hey, Islam needs to be applied, it needs to be affirmed or reaffirmed.” So it is going out of your way to affirm something which was previously self-evident. And, why do you have to affirm it now? Because it is being challenged. Islam in the pre-modern era provides the overarching legal, religious, and moral culture. No one questions that basic order of things. It is only in the modern era, where you have something like secularism or classical liberalism, where that basic structure began to be challenged. That is where this idea comes from, that Islam needs to be reasserted in some distinctive way. And therefore Islam becomes a political project. It is no longer enough to say, “We are Muslim.” You have to go to the next step and say, “What does that mean for politics?” That is basically what Islamism is. But you see why there is no need to have Islamism in the pre-modern era, right?

So in that sense, I argue that Islamism is inherently polarizing, because it depends on its opposite. It couldn’t have existed without its opposite, which in this case is secularism. That’s a problem. You can’t really undo that. Even if secularism won’t win out, you can’t undo the effects of a secular world. We live in a world shaped by secular ideals, whether you like it or not. Muslims have to contend with the results. You can’t pretend the last 150 years didn’t happen.

So I think we have a lot of grist for endless polarization. I think there are ways to address it more effectively, but I’m not under any illusion that the fundamental problem can be resolved in an easy, straightforward way. Going back to that Abbasid Caliphate issue, it’s hard to convey this, because there isn’t an exact parallel for Americans who aren’t Muslim. It is important to get this idea that for a lot of Muslims, you grow up with the idea that Mohammed doesn’t seem like a historical figure. Abu Bakr doesn’t seem like a historical figure. Omar doesn’t seem like a historical figure. You’re on a first-name basis with them. These are people who are alive. That’s why the idea of a caliphate is so powerful. There’s such a reservoir of nostalgia, of longing, that you hear when you’re a kid. You know it intuitively, even if you can’t explain it, that something went wrong, and there used to be something called the Abbasid Caliphate where Muslims were awesome. They’re no longer awesome. That’s the cognitive dissonance here. Islamism isn’t about practicing the religion with no worldly implication.

And you get back to the question of theodicy, or why God allows evil. In the early days of Christianity, Christianity’s early success wasn’t tied to territorial conquest. Early Christians were a minority living under other empires or under Roman law for several centuries. What’s different about Islam is that from the very beginning, you see these two ideas that are intertwined together, which is that if Muslims turn to God, they will achieve worldly success. And you see this in the first 100 years, where you see this incredible amount of territory that Muslims were able to take control of, even as far as modern-day France. So I mean, then there’s this idea that, “Okay, well, if Muslims are not successful, if they aren’t experiencing worldly success, then God is punishing them for not

“Islamism only makes sense in opposition to something else.”
being good Muslims.” So it's hard to disassociate these two concepts, which is an important point.

You’ve said that President Obama, to the extent that he refuses to take on ISIS as something beyond just a bunch of fanatics, isn't taking them on seriously. He's argued, of course, that his position makes sense because connecting ISIS to Islam would validate the terrorists and alienate Muslim allies in the Middle East. What do you make of Obama’s response?

SH: I appreciate that. I think President Obama is well-intentioned. He doesn't want to make Muslims upset? Great. It doesn't mean he's analytically accurate.

But I’m not even sure if it’s even effective on its own terms. If President Obama is concerned about Islamophobia, I worry that by skirting around the religious motivations of ISIS, you’re almost compounding the problem, because it’s sort of opening up space for a dissonance. Ordinary Americans are turning on their TVs, they’re seeing all this conflict in the Middle East, they see ISIS, and it’s clear, it seems self-evident that ISIS has something to do with religion. They’re not a secular Marxist party, right? People see that, and then they see Obama, or whatever politician, saying that, and they say, “Wait a second. What's going on here?” I feel like there has to be a middle ground. Of course, we all know that the majority of Muslims oppose ISIS, but that doesn’t mean that we have to pretend that ISIS is some sort of secular, Ba’athist organization because we don’t want to offend Muslims. I think that Muslims can handle that. It shouldn’t be so controversial to say that ISIS is a tiny sliver of Muslims, and the vast majority of Muslims don’t like them, but they believe that what they’re doing is right, and they believe that what they’re doing is commanded by God.

And they’re not instrumentalizing religion. I don’t like this language where—I always hear this kind of thing: “They’re using religion, but what they really care about is something else.” Why couldn’t it be the other way around? Why aren’t people using politics or power for religious ends? No one thinks about it that way. Why can’t they be instrumentalizing power for religion?

So secularization might not be the endgame then. Not to get too speculative, but what do you think the endgame is? What happens after ISIS goes away? Will there ever be another caliphate? What does the future of Islam look like?

SH: You know, there are certain things in life that you like in theory, but you don’t actually want to act on in practice. I wonder if the caliphate is, as an idea, one of those things. It's nice, but you don't want to mess with the historical legacy. You want to keep the Abbasid Caliphate off to one side and protect it. You don't want to infringe on that memory. And I guess the Righteously Guided Caliphs, and, to a lesser extent, the Ottoman Caliphate, are the same way. The caliphate is a good reservoir for nostalgia, but it's bound to disappoint if anyone actually tries to recapture its glories.

It’s interesting, because ISIS, in a sort of brilliant stroke, appropriates the idea of the caliphate—but at the same time, to what extent will ISIS taint the idea of the caliphate? We’ll have to wait and see how the experience of ISIS affects how people conceive of this particular word, “caliphate.” As for what the endgame is, we live in a world of nation-states. I have a professor friend who said, half-jokingly, “I'm going to bet money that Erdogan re-announces the caliphate in 2023,” the centennial. That's an interesting thing. I’m sure deep-down, he would like to do that, just for his historical legacy, but we live in a world of reality. And this is a constant tension that I get at in the book: what we want in our ideal world is different from what we can accomplish in the world we actually live in. That’s just part of humanity. We want things, even in our own personal ideals, and we have the real world we live in, and we’re always struggling to close the gap between what we are and what we ideally would want things to be.

It’s the same in the case of Islamism. Islamists want things in their ideal world, but those things aren't possible. Pre-modern Islamic law wasn’t designed for the modern era, so you’re trying to square an impossible circle. How do you do that?
Pop Culture and Political Critique in Syria
How Khan al-Harir Denounced State Cronyism and Authoritarianism Under the Assad Regime

Austin E. Gray

Austin E. Gray graduated with honors from Davidson College in 2016 after majoring in Arab Studies and Economics. He is joining the US Navy as an Intelligence Officer.
Under the rule of Hafez and Bashar al-Assad, Syria has for decades been a highly autocratic security state. The ruling regime has attracted much-deserved criticism from human rights organizations and the international community.¹ Before the Arab Spring, however, domestic criticism of the Assad government within Syria was largely stifled by harsh information controls.² A so-called “barrier of fear” kept most dissent quiet. Some forms of media, however, did manage to make it past the censors, voicing subtle criticisms of the regime many years before the brave protestors on the streets of Dar’a and Homs made them heard throughout the world.³ Before 2011, television dramas played an outsized and essential role in critiquing the many flaws of Syria’s political system. One drama in particular, Khan al-Harir, offered a particularly holistic summary of the complaints brought to the streets in the first days of what would become Syria’s
terrible and tragic civil war. The series found a way to critique the Assad regime’s oppression, autocracy, and cronyism years before such a level and scope of criticism was thought to be acceptable in a heavily censored state. Moreover, Khan al-Harir enjoyed a massive domestic audience, broadcasting its message to millions of Syrians. Fifteen years before the Arab Spring and years before Bashar al-Assad would even ascend to the presidency, it presented an early version of the critique that would one day threaten to topple the Syrian regime.

**Ramadan Miniseries in Syria: “Important National Pastime”**

To understand the place of Khan al-Harir, it is important first to look at the role of the television industry in the Arab world and more specifically in Syria. The prime season for television in much of the Arab world is Ramadan. It has been compared to a month-long Super Bowl for the Arab TV market. The Syrian television audience is as much a part of this Ramadan TV “bonanza” as any Arab population. A 1998 report on Syrian media estimated that 99% of urban homes had television sets. Christa Salamandra claims that “[w]atching these series has become as much a part of Ramadan for the Damascenes as breaking fast with tamarind juice.” Although it is hard to measure exactly how much extra time Syrians spend watching TV during Ramadan, observers agree that Ramadan is Syria’s peak viewership season. In fact, many of the most acclaimed shows (musalsalat) are purposefully produced for and broadcast during Ramadan. The content of these programs is thus highly influential, garnering avid attention from wide swaths of Syrian society.

**Television’s Political Potential in a Highly Censored State**

According to Miriam Cooke’s Dissident Syria: Making Oppositional Arts Official, the roots of Syria’s strong censorship can be traced all the way back to the coup that brought the Ba’ath party to power in 1963. With the Ba’ath came martial law and in 1970—after Hafez al-Assad ascended to the presidency in another coup—the laws were strengthened yet again. Since then, the Assad regime has had what Cooke calls “absolute control over the production of culture and the distribution of information.” Nearly every form of media was state-owned, and those that were not were highly censored. Cooke summarizes that “taboo subjects included ‘politics, ideology, religion, society, and economics.’” The regime relied heavily on propaganda. After decades of Ba’ath rule, this environment became so stifling that Syrians were thirsty for any information or media of differing content.

Television was well-positioned relative to other forms of media. Having the massive Ramadan audience—and with written forms of media losing readership—these musalsalat were positioned to be the vehicle for social and political debate and commentary in the 1990s thanks to evolving laws and technology. One potential cause of the declining role of written media in Syria could be the heavy censorship of the highly autocratic regime. Every book in Syria must
The prime season for television is Ramadan. It has been compared to a month-long Super Bowl for the Arab TV market.

have an official stamp of approval from the Ministry of Information. Khaled Khalifa, an acclaimed screenwriter and novelist known for his criticism of the regime, explains that "[w]e don’t have theater, we don’t have newspapers... the only way for political expression is through television programs." Although television had long been censored and controlled just like any media, it began to gain more autonomy in the 1990s.

This decade was a period of development and change for the TV industry. In 1988, private TV production was allowed. By the early nineties, the television industry had begun to grow—the regime passed another law in 1991 encouraging private, entrepreneurial participation in the industry—and would eventually become what Joubin calls the "primary arena" for social and political discussions. Even though private production of film was permitted, however, it was still subject to heavy screening and censorship at every stage.

The rise of the satellite TV industry brought more freedom, variety, and competition to the airwaves in the 90s. Although satellite dishes were officially illegal throughout the 1990s, Syrians still adopted them quite quickly. Emphasizing their expansive presence, Scott Peterson wrote in 1999 that "[s]atellite dishes clog the rooftops of every building in the capital." He concluded that the reason satellite television is so popular in Syria is that it provides new and different programming. Martin Dick summarizes that the advent of satellite television turned the Arab world from many small, state-controlled markets into one expansive, competitive market. Before satellite, Syrian viewers had been restricted to watching just the state-run channels. With satellite, they could watch everything from pornography to Israeli news. Shows produced in Syria, however, like Khan al-Harir, were still subject to the usual production-level censorship. Although some outside shows have gained popularity in Syria over the years, and parts of Syria’s TV industry have moved to Lebanon during today’s war, Syrian shows in the 1990s were more popular than their international competitors. Khan al-Harir was one of the hits that helped Syrian dramas steal the spotlight. It is reasonable to assume that in the face of competition from regional satellite content, the regime permitted private production and allowed some more controversial shows to be produced in Syria, where it could still exercise control over production. The alternative would likely have been audiences watching even less favorable content produced abroad and broadcast via the uncontrollable satellite airwaves. Joubin's research finds that some observers even believed that "the appearance of satellite television broke the regime's control of knowledge and information." Perhaps allowing satellite dishes at all—Joubin mentions that the regime considered banning them completely—is one example of the regime presenting a modern, pluralistic façade to the world. Despite heavy state controls, the television industry's newfound freedom and dynamism in the 90s had the potential to create the environment for change in media content too.

Making it Past the Censors: Historical Allegory, Tanfis, and Whispering

Cooke explains convincingly, through analysis of art and interviews with artists, that this burdensome state control stimulated alternate forms of conveying dissenting messages. A story directly disparaging life under the regime would probably not make it to publication, but one cloaked in allegory and ambiguity might. As private television production started to take off in the nineties, it was a relatively dynamic form of media that reached massive audiences and could convey a dissenting message. Television’s strength in getting political commentary past the censors relied...
on three main features: the already-discussed new satellite technology, allegorical disguises for critical content, and, perhaps surprisingly, the censors’ purposeful permission of political criticism in the media.24

Although Syrian television production was heavily censored, political messages still reached audiences thanks to creative screenwriting and some ambiguity. One of the most effective tools was historical allegory. Cooke discusses Syrian political allegories in great detail, citing Sumita Chakravarty of the School of Media Studies at New York’s New School. Chakravarty assesses that the effectiveness of the allegory truly comes from “the past being the displaced site of the tensions, failures and anxieties of the present.”25 Syrian screenwriters, therefore, could set their stories innocently in the past, in real or imagined history, but in such a way that they illuminated the concerns, the hopes, and the pains of their contemporary audience. Naomi Saqr concurs, writing that “any political comment that passes the censor only does so because it is heavily disguised. Thus, screenplays or works for the theatre are routinely set in other decades, or even other centuries.”26

Claiming that camouflage is the only way for a political message to reach audiences, however, could be a stretch, given the extreme level of control apparently held by Syria’s Ministry of Information. A prominent theory explained by Wedeen discusses the potential for purposeful regime toleration of unflattering political content. Wedeen writes that “in Arabic, the word tanfis means ‘letting out air’ and is used by many Syrians to describe the perception that politically critical television serials and films operate as ‘safety valves,’ allowing people to vent frustrations and displace or relieve tensions that otherwise might find expression in political action.” So, although it would be convenient to assume simply that a critical show like Khan al-Harir slipped by the censors thanks to clever writing, the potential for intentional complicity by the censors in airing this criticism is notable.27 Cooke and Joubin also discuss the tanfis theory, with Cooke arguing that the government uses “commissioned criticism” to create a “democratic façade.”28 With such an opaque government, attempting to analyze regime intent can only go so far, but acknowledging the reality of permitted dissidence alongside artistic attempts at disguise is essential.

**Khan al-Harir’s Historical Allegory: Nostalgia for Democracy**

*Khan al-Harir* aired over two seasons. The first season, in 1996, ran for twenty-three episodes and the second, in 1998, ran for twenty-five. Episodes generally lasted forty-five minutes.29 *Khan al-Harir* depicts a heavy-handed security state employing cronysim, clientelism, and raw force to assert control over civil society. Valiant attempts at democratic expression and love-based romantic relationships are undermined and fought by selfish cronies of the regime and the state bureaucrats backing them. The screenplay was written by Nihad Sirees, who has criticized the regime in his novels and now lives in exile in Germany, Haitham Haqqi—“the Godfather of Syrian television...
drama”—directed, and is also critical of the regime. The show is primarily a historical drama, set during the political turbulence of the 1958–1961 United Arab Republic.

Although Khan al-Harir has not received due attention as a holistic critique of the Assad regime, one axiomatic aspect of its message, while still under-discussed, is its embrace of democracy. Sirees, in an interview, explained that, “I wanted to tell people how there was democracy [in Syrian history]. “I wanted people to cry, or to push them for change when they compared everything with the present.” A vibrant, full-throated, pluralistic democratic process is indeed what he portrays in the beginning of Khan al-Harir. Khaled Khalifa, a noted author and screenwriter who, like Sirees, is critical of the regime, recalled his main takeaway from Khan al-Harir as the reminder that Syria had a real “golden age” of democracy in the fifties.

Essential to the portrayal of this vibrant democracy are the nuanced political discussions undertaken by the characters. Positions range from Nasserist support of union with Egypt, to union with Baghdad, to an independent Syria, to federalism, to the well-trodden socialism-capitalism debate. Citizens discuss politics at home and at work, hear news on the radio, and rally for their faction in the streets. Joubin adeptly summarizes the show’s discourse as “a depiction of the vivid debates on socialism, capitalism, and a multi-party system,” all of course within the context of the potential—and ultimately realized—union with Egypt. Men meet to debate politics and listen to the news together. Some are so inspired by the political news they hear over the radio that they rush off to join the army and fight against the “triple threat” of Britain, France, and Israel that has attacked their Arab brothers in Egypt. Still others, like Kamal, make calculated and unprincipled political pivots in order to protect their interests and stay in the good graces of the government.

The critique begins to gain steam as Nasser’s increasingly autocratic regime dominates Syria and clamps down on democratic politics. Although the democratic debate is vibrant in the first season, by the end of the second season, Khan al-Harir’s Aleppines have come to live under an oppressive police state with uncanny similarities to Assad’s. Individuals with nuanced political stances, such as Murad, are detained even when they pose no threat to the state and support the party’s main goal, Arab unity. Just as in Assad’s Syria, expression of political dissent becomes a crime. One conversation Murad has with Tareq serves to highlight this criminalization of nuanced, individual politics:

Murad: I hate you, but I don’t hate unity. Unity is important in the hearts of the people. I wanted unity. But my unity is not the same as your unity. I’m a Syrian citizen. You’re also Syrian. But the difference is that I respect the opinions of others. You want unity with Egypt in order to usurp the opinion of others. You want unity with Egypt to cancel the others... This unity won’t continue.

Tareq: Parties won’t continue.

Murad: Parties are important. And unity is popular among the people. Everyone wanted unity. But you didn’t deliver what you promised. You made more enemies than you gained friendships. You put everyone who was with unity in jail. You haven’t left any friends for yourselves.

Tareq and Murad’s conversation serves to highlight the transformation of the government from a popularly backed movement to an oppressive dictatorship.

The narrative arc of Khan al-Harir’s two seasons deserves focus for its critical strength. The story starts by reminding viewers of Syria’s once-robust democracy yet over the course of the show’s three-year historical period, the audience witnesses a political transformation—a condensed but convincing version of the transformation Syria has truly undergone in the decades since its democratic “golden age.” The creators use the audience’s nostalgia for the democratic, pluralistic past to amplify its frustrations over Syria’s disheartening present. The late 1950s were a turning point for Syrian politics, a dictatorship watershed with long-lasting, still-uncertain consequences. By setting
its story in the era of UAR politics, with its ricocheting shifts between democracy and dictatorship. Khan al-Harir aptly critiques modern Ba'ath politics, recognizing that Nasser’s authoritarianism yielded directly to that of Assad. Thus, the historical allegory of Syria’s transformation from democracy to dictatorship is an important aspect of Khan al-Harir’s critique.

Going Further: Khan al-Harir’s Portrayal of Cronyism, Clientelism, and Hopelessness in Syrian Society

Khan al-Harir’s pro-democracy allegory is not the only element of its political critique. The roles and storylines of three key characters—a businessman and two bureaucrats—exemplify the show’s denunciation of Ba’athist cronyism and the state security apparatus.

First, Kamal is a wealthy silk trader who relies on government connections to maintain his influence, his business, and his romantic life. He is happy to become politically pliable—and thus willing to appear unmanly and hypocritical—on the most pertinent issue of Egyptian unity in order to stay in favor with the state. Consider this following quotation from the miniseries, where a colleague articulates Kamal’s foundationless politics:

Nufa: Unity with Egypt is becoming a reality. It’s better for us to get on board in order not to isolate ourselves. If we say no to Abdel Nasser, we’re saying no to unity. And we won’t be part of the government; we’ll be out of the picture. We have to say yes to maintain our presence, our share, and our interests.

Kamal’s character represents the pliant and subservient wing of the merchant class that is happy to side with the oppressive regime in exchange for personal and financial benefit. In a detailed biography of Hafez al-Assad, Patrick Seale details the socioeconomic arrangement established by the Ba’athists: “So unfettered were their activities and so extensive the networks of patronage and clientelism they built up that some spoke of the emergence of a ‘merchant-military complex.’” Kamal represents the class of super wealthy merchants grateful to be a part of the ruling polity simply to be kept protected from the subjective eyes of the security apparatus and to further its own business dealings.

Kamal’s state patrons are represented by two bureaucrats in the intelligence service, Tareq and Sayedna. Both exercise wide-ranging power, covering everything from arrests to bank lending, completely arbitrarily. Sayedna’s very name is another critical tool. This character, imbued with more political power than any other in the script, is defined by his position and by his power so entirely that everyone around him calls him only “our master.” These men, along with their police henchmen, are the show’s villains. They destroy the life’s work of the show’s only entrepreneur, Rabi, tear apart happy families, and have ears only for the wealthy and well connected. This portrayal of the show’s villains fits neatly into Sirees’ broader critique of the Assad regime, reminding viewers of the corrupt, self-serving, and arbitrary uses of power by the ruling elites.

The Existing Discussion: Khan al-Harir’s Contribution

Broad industry analysis from experts like Cooke, Joubin, and Wedeen points out that several other shows have done much to stimulate Syrian political debate. However, their analysis demonstrates that, until the time of Khan al-Harir, these political shows were limited to parody and comedy, not serious drama. In discussing examples of taufis in the 90s, Wedeen highlights mostly comedies and cartoons. She mentions films, but downplays their relevance due to their small and largely intellectual audience. Films did not have a mass audience like television. Her hypothesis, however—that Syrian television was made up of giggly soap operas in the second half of the 20th century and did not find a serious voice until the 21st—was formed before the 90s had run their course and before the acclaimed and regime-critical second season of Khan al-Harir aired in 1998. Sirees, Khan al-Harir’s screenwriter and a highly-regarded author, claims that his show “helped to shift TV from silliness into a forum for quality fiction,” a claim
“By setting its story in the era of UAR politics, with its ricocheting shifts between democracy and dictatorship, Khan al-Harir aptly critiques modern Ba’ath politics, recognizing that Nasser’s authoritarianism yielded directly to that of Assad.”

support by Wedeen’s research. Looking at Syria’s earliest acclaimed television dramas, such as those by Nihad Qal’i and Durayd Lahham which dominated Syrian television for decades, their legacy is largely one of commentary through comedy. Marlin Dick, too, credits Khan al-Harir with raising the regional profile of Syrian dramas. Given the timeline of Khan al-Harir’s airing, if Sirees is correct that his show was at the forefront of serious, critical television content, then Khan al-Harir’s contribution to Syrian anti-Ba’ath dissidence cannot be ignored.

The critique Sirees and Haqqi articulate in Khan al-Harir lent an early voice to the desire for democratic reforms and an end to the abuses of the security apparatus—the exact desires that would finally be made explicit in 2011. Moreover, Khan al-Harir explores other fundamental issues in Syria’s government and society—state cronyism, lack of social mobility, and authoritarian overreach into civil society—that were as important in creating the conditions for the Arab Spring, even if they were not the subject of its main slogans.

Khan al-Harir offers an avant-garde explication of the grievances that would eventually erupt into political disaster in Syria. These grievances were fiercely branded and broadcast during the Arab Spring protests. Some of these concerns—especially calls for democratic reform and a less oppressive security apparatus—had briefly entered public discourse early in Bashar al-Assad’s presidency. Khan al-Harir, however, came first. It criticized cronyism, dictatorship, and institutions such as the security services years before Hafez al-Assad died.

In this way, Khan al-Harir can be considered “avant-garde” because its message came before its time. For example, torture was not elsewhere portrayed on television until after 2000; Khan al-Harir depicted torture in 1998. Taken as a whole, the series disrupts and adds nuance to an oversimplified timeline that assumes today’s level of political disidence to be a phenomenon of Bashar al-Assad’s Syria alone. Moreover, Khan al-Harir demonstrates that developments in technology, law, censorship policy, and
storytelling helped catalyze a political discourse that has been implicitly branded as a product of the transition from Hafez to Bashar—a macro-level change where coincidence is not necessarily causality.

It is no secret today that *Khan al-Harir* is a critique of Assad’s Syria. Haqqi, who directed the show, describes a lengthy censorship process that resulted in many cuts to the second season. He adds that “the fairly direct political critique outraged the authorities” but that “they could not ban the mini-series because of its popularity.” Haqqi also holds that the censorship committee underestimated the impact of *Khan al-Harir*, realizing its role in encouraging dissidence only too late. 

Sirees says in an interview that he “wanted to tell people how there was democracy [in Syrian history],” that he “wanted people to cry, or to push them for change when they compared everything with the present.”

Indeed, any audience cognizant of the 1990s reality in which *Khan al-Harir* was produced would look at the repressive government depicted in the late UAR period and recognize the Assad regime. Joubin describes the regime depicted in *Khan al-Harir* as “increasingly autocratic” and having “a direct correlation to Hafiz al-Assad’s all-powerful Ba’ath party dictatorship.” Through this explicit political statement, the series helped to illuminate issues that had persisted throughout the Assad years and began to stimulate debate that would eventually climax in the now-familiar protests.

In fact, political critique in *musalsalat* would become bolder and more common just a few years after *Khan al-Harir*. In an article on Syrian press freedom, Rhonda Roumani writes that, in 2000, with the transition from Hafez to Bashar al-Assad, “came a thaw that Syrian journalists and intellectuals hopefully referred to as Damascus Spring.” The first year of Bashar al-Assad’s rule brought tempered reforms and modernization. With this limited opening, television drama creators saw more room for political criticism in their art. One *musalsal, Buq’at Daw*, helps illuminate this timeline. Known for its constant envelope-pushing—*Al-Monitor* rightly calls it “a bastion of courage for consistently defying the limits of censorship”—*Buq’at Daw* premiered in the first year of Bashar al-Assad’s presidency and ran for over a decade. However, Joubin writes that the Syrian television drama would soon, in those early years of Bashar al-Assad’s presidency, reach its viewership and popularity peak. Not

*Khan al-Harir’s* success was made possible by the proliferation of satellite dishes, like those seen here across the city of Damascus in 2005. Upyemooz, Wikimedia Commons.
coincidentally, Bashar al-Assad’s Damascus Spring peaked even sooner, late in 2001. Although there had been relatively vibrant discourse among intellectuals and demands for freedom and pluralism, Assad soon changed tack and arrested many dissidents. By the end of 2001 the chance of political reform that came with Bashar’s inauguration dimmed in favor of the regime’s old ways and old guard. Still, although the Damascus Spring was short-lived, critical shows like Buqat Daw’ demonstrate that some elements of the thaw were lasting.

Adding Nuance to the Timeline

Khan al-Harir’s example serves to bring nuance to an otherwise oversimplified timeline of dissident media—one that portrays the ironclad rule of Hafez al-Assad through the last decades of the 20th century, a brief blip of dissidence and glasnost in the 2001 Damascus Spring after Bashar took over, and then relative silence again until the Arab Spring in 2011. Khan al-Harir disrupts this narrative. Close examination of the show reveals that it gave voice to many of the criticisms heard during the Damascus Spring, but years before. Although experts like Salamandra and Lesch characterize more open political dissent to be a Bashar-era development, Khan al-Harir shows that significant dissent is not a phenomenon unique to the 21st century and that stronger dissent began to break through as early as 1996.

The show deserves acclaim both for its unappreciated depth and breadth and for the boldness of its avant-garde message. Although Sirees, Haqqi, Khalifa, and Joubin all highlight Khan al-Harir’s treatment of the demise of Syrian democracy, and Joubin ventures into discussion of arbitrary detention and parodies of authoritarianism, no analysis captures the full importance of Khan al-Harir. These well-versed experts argue that the show portrays the “from” in Syria’s journey from democracy to dictatorship, but barely ventures into the “to.”

This is inaccurate. Much of Khan al-Harir’s critical strength comes from portraying the “to”; by delving into the outcome and the unpleasant consequences of Syria’s undemocratic turn in the mid-20th century, it shows its audience the result of the journey Syria has undergone. In doing so, it offers striking parallels to the Assad regime and gets away with more criticism than any other form of media at the time.

Khan al-Harir stands out most of all for the earliness of its critique. Although it was broadcast in the midto-late 90s, while Hafez al-Assad was still at the helm, the show resembles the dissident television content of the early 2000s, when television dramas were, in Joubin’s words, the “primary arena” for political and social debate. It was an early indicator of the role of satellite technology in breaking the censors’ control of the media while simultaneously demonstrating the censorship committee’s unwillingness to fully block every piece of critical entertainment.

In summary, Khan al-Harir critiqued some of the most fundamental injustices of the Assad regime—notably the oppressive security apparatus and autocracy-backed cronyism—long before the Damascus Spring made these complaints more common and more public. It mocked the centralizing, autocratic cronyism employed by the Ba’ath Party and mocked non-governmental forms of dictatorship, like authoritarian fathers. It showed the permeating reach of Syria’s regime into crevices of the private sector and civil society. It displayed the abuses of an oppressive, paranoid security state and the hopelessness felt by citizens unable to pursue their dreams in their homeland.

Khan al-Harir is a reminder of the resourcefulness and tenacity of the Syrian people—a reminder that at the height of Ba’athist authoritarianism, a group of committed citizens found a way to reach millions with their anti-government critique. Regardless of the outcome of the current war, the story of Khan al-Harir is grounds for hope that Syrians will never stop speaking up on behalf of freedom.
ENDNOTES

1 Human Rights Watch | 350 Fifth Avenue, 34th Floor | New York, and NY 10118-3299 USA | t 1.212.290.4700, "No Room to Breathe," Human Rights Watch, October 16, 2007, 1-5.


6 Hammod in Prager, "Bedouinity on Stage. The Rise of The Bedouin Soap Opera (Musalsal Badawi) in Arab Television," 62.


16 Ibid., 91.

17 Cooke, Dissident Syria Making Oppositional Arts Official.


20 Dick, "Arab Media & Society;"


22 Ibid.

One theory advanced by cooke is that the regime purposefully allows some rule breaking, creating the illusion of freedom within the country.


26 Saq, Walls of Silence: Media and Censorship in Syria, 8.1.


28 Cooke, Dissident Syria Making Oppositional Arts Official, 72.

29 Nihad Sirees, Khan Al-Harir (The Silk Bazaar, Part One), 1996.


32 Nihad Sirees, Interview with the author.

33 Khaled Khalifa, Interview with the author.

34 Sirees, Khan Al-Harir (The Silk Bazaar, Part One), Episode 8.

36 Sirees, Khan Al-Harir (The Silk Bazaar, Part Two), Episode 10.


38 Ibid., Episode 22.

Nufa is another Aleppine businessman with similar interests to Kamal.


40 Sirees, Khan Al-Harir (The Silk Bazaar, Part Two), Episode 22.

41 Miriam Cooke, "Email Message to Austin Gray," February 17, 2016.

42 Wedeen, Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria, 92-120.


45 Dick, “Arab Media & Society.”


48 Sirees, “We Only Find Good Literature from Crisis.”


51 Dick, “Arab Media & Society.”


54 Salamandra and Asad, “Spotlight on the Bashár Al-Asad Era: The Television Drama Outpouring.”
Hope and Struggle in the Hashemite Kingdom

Portraits of Jordan

AJ Naddaff

AJ Naddaff is majoring in Arab Studies and political science at Davidson College. During college, he has worked as an Assistant Teacher in the French and Francophone Studies Department and as a primary research assistant in the Arab Studies Department. This photo essay is the result of Naddaff’s work in Amman, Jordan, where he collaborated with the US Embassy, served as a translator and photographer for Humans of Amman, and studied at the Qasid Arabic Institute. Naddaff would like to share credit for this essay with Waleed Alkoo, who accompanied him during his travels in Jordan.
Left: In the morning, I have a schedule. I wake up, do some exercises, read some text from the Holy Qur’an, drink coffee with my parents, and then read the newspaper. I divide my time.

It’s because I’m an optimist. I only sit with optimists. If I meet a pessimist and feel their effect on me, I immediately leave to a nice place, like the Dead Sea, which is the lowest point in the world. If you stand by the waves and look into the sea, you lose all disillusionment. You can return home afterward, and your mind – it’s cleared.

Below: My husband got married to another woman and left me and my five children, who were very, very small back then. It’s a tough life. To provide for the family, I’ve been selling clothes and small items on this bridge for about six years. I get very tired. I’ve even been to the hospital. When I had to undertake surgery, some foreigners studying Arabic at the nearby institute assisted me by giving me money, thanks be to God.

This is my daughter, Alba. I’m very proud of her because she is fasting right now. I try to teach my children to fast from the first grade. It is all about the family. If you are raised in a family that fasts and prays, then you will end up doing the same and pass the same habits on to your children. I have read the holy Qur’an twice just in this Ramadan alone, and I am working on reading it again.
Above: I left to Gaza Camp because I didn’t have a good relationship with my dad in Amman. My mom’s family lives in the camp. They accepted me and gave me a place to live.

When I was in Amman, if I needed a job I could snap my fingers and get one. But not in the camp—not in abject poverty, not without resources. For three months, I didn’t have ten cents in my pocket. I didn’t buy anything, not even a cigarette.

When I finally felt ready to go back home, I decided I needed to show others what Gaza Camp is really like, how these families live in such dire conditions. So, I started bringing groups of people from Amman to Gaza Camp, even groups of people from outside Jordan. I’ve now brought over 200 groups to the camp.

You don’t need to be a Palestinian to see that these people are suffering. If you are human, if you are Israeli, if you are American, if you are Saudi, you should still understand how they are feeling.

Left: As a Gazan, I do not have the right to speak about politics. I’m not allowed to visit Palestine. I’m not allowed to visit outside the camp. Everything is twice as expensive for us.

Why? Because I’m Gazawi. I am a “guest” inside their country. We do not have national ID numbers because supposedly, we’re going back to Palestine. But when, exactly?
Above: The other night, my taxi driver began talking to me. “Some guys are willing to pay a lot of money for young, beautiful girls like you,” he said. “I work with them. You should go for it.” When I told him no, he responded more forcefully. He said, “Does your dad live here in Amman? Or away? Because it would be easier if he lived in another country.”

I could tell he was on something by the look of his eyes, all beady and bloodshot. I told him, “Let me out right here!” I hoped the force of my voice would hide every bit of apprehension inside me.

“No, no,” he answered. “Let me drop you off at home, so I know exactly where you live.” “Let me out right here!”

It was to no avail. Nothing worked until I said, “I am calling the police.” Then, he let me out, but only after I accepted his phone number in case I changed my mind.

I don’t tell anyone about this. If I tell my parents, I’ll never be allowed out of the house again. But I’m not unique. Every girl in Amman has a story like this. I hope someday that life will be easier for girls, and I dream—even if it’s just a dream—that female harassment will eventually come to an end.

Right: no caption
Left, below: We have a school here in the village. Even the Bedouins who live in the desert bring their children to and from school each day. Those Bedouins are actually more wealthy than us because they sell livestock, but in the village, the government supports us with developments in education and tourism. In fact, a lot of people in Wadi Rum work for the government.

If we have any problems with another tribe, first we go to their Sheikh. If our tribe is hurt and attacked by another tribe, their Sheikh must come and seek forgiveness until our injured tribesmen are healed. After he gets better, the Sheikh must apologize again on behalf of the tribe. If our man returns to good health, we usually forgive them. We have generosity and forgiveness for others. However, if the attacked person dies, that is a problem. Such circumstances call for revenge, but this rarely happens. We usually wait the situation out until a peace deal is made. Sometimes, money is exchanged in order to help the family of the deceased.

The hardest and biggest problems are between men and women. Nowadays, it is normal to marry a girl from another tribe, but if a guy harasses a girl from another tribe, you can only imagine the bloodshed that breaks out.
Left: I have lived in Gaza Camp in Jerash for 40 years. This is my home. This is all I’ve ever known. Even if I could return, I wouldn’t want to. Why would I want to start from scratch all over again?

As a Gazan, it is very hard to get a job, so when I was a student in school, I studied my hardest. I passed my senior year exam, but I didn’t have enough money to continue in school, so I turned to writing. My hobby soon became a passion, and I realized I wanted to become a director. My current project is about the tribes of the pre-Islamic Arabian Gulf. I did a lot of research from books and the Internet so I could string together a realistic setting for a pre-Islamic society. But even with all that, the creative aspect must come from within. I am meeting with a couple of producers next week to take my work to the next level, God willing.

I see a lot of pessimistic people around me who say that there is no hope for people like us. Of course, I cannot deny that there are great tragedies in life, but I also can’t say there are not a lot of beautiful things. I believe there is hope everywhere if you are willing to grasp it, no matter who you are.

Below: I used to doodle people out of old black-and-white family photo albums. This exhibition is about taking the doodles out of the sketchbook and turning them into something real, something substantial and conceptual for the audience. Like here, I recreated my father in two pieces, one when he was seventeen and one before he died. Each portrait symbolizes a different aspect of his personality.

Family roots are important to me, because a lot of my personality is passed down onto me from other generations. So a large part of my project is self-exploration, although I think if I drew myself, it would still be incomplete, because I’m still forming as a person.
The Dubai Shopping Festival

DIVERSIFICATION IN THE EMIRATI ECONOMY

Anna Hess

Anna Hess is an undergraduate in the University of Pennsylvania’s College of Arts and Sciences set to graduate in 2018. Originally from Los Angeles, she is a major in International Relations and Modern Middle Eastern Studies. She is a member of the Sigma Iota Rho Honor Society for International Studies and has spent time studying in Hong Kong. With this article, Anna was the first prize recipient of the Penn Middle East Center’s Undergraduate Essay Contest of 2016.
The Dubai Shopping Festival (DSF) celebrated its 20th anniversary during its month-long run in January 2015. The festival, led by the Dubai Festivals and Retail Sector Promotions Establishment (DFRSPE), welcomed over 4.4 million visitors from all over the world and included a full calendar of more than 150 entertainment events complemented by fireworks, live music from regional stars, and widespread, tax-free sales.\(^1\) New for 2015 was a Celebrity Pop-Up Shop that featured American fashion star Nicole Richie among others, and it offered the opportunity to win a piece of the ‘Dubai Celebration Chain’ – a 5.5 km long, 256 kilo heavy gold chain\(^2\) fashioned as the world’s longest handmade gold chain. This was just the latest installment in a festival that, in two decades of existence, has drawn in over $39 billion in revenues for the travel, retail, hospitality, and entertainment sectors.\(^3\)
In the face of the DSF’s opulent success, it is hard to comprehend that, forty years ago, Dubai was considered one of the least-developed regions in the world. The transformation of Dubai into one of the world’s top tourist attractions is a testament to its success in leaving behind developing-nation status to become an internationally renowned economic center, all in just a few short decades. The DSF serves as an exemplary case study in which the previously oil-centric emirate diversified its economy by capitalizing on the intersection of retail and tourism—creating thereby the profitable tool of “shopping tourism.”

In the early 1980s, oil production in Dubai accounted for two thirds of the country’s gross domestic product (GDP), effectively carrying the emirate’s economy. However, the volatility of oil resources spurred Dubai to take significant steps to increase non-oil sectors’ economic contribution by the year 2030. Dubai’s Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing (DTCM) now reports that tourism accounts for 22.6% of the emirate’s gross domestic product, leaving oil to account for only 7%. This shift places tourist-centric events like the DSF at the forefront of Dubai’s economic stage.

This article will address the DSF’s distinct impact in the four subsections that follow. The first will supply an overview of Dubai’s oil-driven rise from developing nation to advanced economic center, providing context to the emirate’s ability to facilitate mass tourism. The second will look at Dubai’s focused efforts to diversify its economy—by way of robust retail and tourism industries—through particular projects and initiatives. The third will explain the specific lengths to which the government has gone to facilitate this economically advantageous national event, and shed light on the shopper’s experience within the event. The fourth will conclude by assessing the utility of the festival model in advancing tourism industry progress by evaluating its effect on Dubai’s economy as a whole. This article utilizes data from official sources within the Dubai government, such as the Dubai Economic Council and the Dubai Statistics Center for tourism, retail, and economic statistics. It also incorporates Arab press coverage of the DSF as well as findings from previous research on subjects from experiential marketing models to the historical economic development of Dubai and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Dubai’s Rise to International Port and Commercial Hub

Before oil concessions changed the fabric of Dubai’s economic system, the emirate was already an active trade center in the Arab Gulf, though only made up of a small cluster of settlements near the Dubai River. Dubai prospered from positive relations with Britain, and its merchants frequented British-controlled Bombay with their wares. However, the main revenue streams of the emirate shifted unavoidably when the Great Depression hit in the 1930s. The mercantile pearling industry collapsed, and air travel and oil simultaneously became the new cash cows of the region.

The breakdown of the pearling industry hastened the merchant oligarchy’s loss of power in Dubai while new revenues increased the power of the ruler of Dubai, Sheikh Saeed bin Maktoum bin Hasher Al Maktoum.

“The transformation of Dubai into one of the world’s top tourist attractions is a testament to its success in leaving behind developing-nation status to become an internationally renowned economic center, all in just a few short decades.”
(1912-58). Britain chose Dubai as the location for an air base in 1934, which began its influence as a port for air travel as well as sea travel—a distinction that it continues to hold today. Oil exploration began shortly after, and royalties poured into the treasury of the ruling sheikh. Despite the resource royalties, however, the collapse of the mercantile trade system and the British's biased protection of Indian merchants caused a deep depression in Dubai.

In the 1940s, the Arabian Gulf was hit hard by the Second World War as supplies were cut off and famine spread through the region. Nevertheless, Dubai was able to prosper as a trading post at the expense of other poorer Gulf countries, like Qatar and Bahrain, by opening a black market for colonial food rations from Britain. At this point, Dubai’s energetic business community and British Political Agent status gave Dubai a leg up in international trade into the 1950s.

Dubai’s merchant community set the groundwork for the diversification of its economy by improving the ports and waterways. Accommodations were made for large import steamer ships at the end of the 1950s, and Dubai’s modern economic success was spearheaded by the trade-minded Sheikh Rashid bin Saeed Al Maktoum, the Vice-President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai (1958-90). Sheikh Rashid is famously known for transforming Dubai from a modest settlement to an international commercial hub, which he did in part thanks to newfound oil wealth. But he was well-aware that oil was not a permanent basis on which to build his emirate’s economy. A quote popularly attributed to him is, “My grandfather rode a camel, my father rode a camel, I drive a Mercedes, my son drives a Land Rover, his son will drive a Land Rover, but his son will ride a camel.” The quote emblematizes the Sheikh’s intention to break Dubai’s dependency on oil before fossil fuel ran out. It reveals his determination, in other words, to avert the return to the camel.

For this purpose, Sheikh Rashid continued to focus on improving trade even as oil concessions grew. He began modernizing Dubai through the 1960s by providing the first modern medical care in the lower Gulf, as well as building on education reforms, establishing a professional police force, and setting up the modern municipality. The Sheikh allowed for the privatization of many community services and utilities by merchants, namely electric and telecommunications.

In the 1970s, oil extraction in the Arabian Gulf grew rapidly, and oil wealth was used in Dubai to develop infrastructure, such as further improvement of the port, and to make its citizens significantly more prosperous. Sheikh Rashid continued to pursue...
sustainable economic and administrative reforms that aided the success of business. For example, thanks to the city’s low tax system, customs duties in Dubai have never exceeded 2 percent. Communications and industrialization industries developed alongside oil trade, and Dubai’s commerce with other Gulf countries grew and diversified until the mid-1990s. Dubai again profited off of wartime trade during the Iraqi-Iranian war by maintaining a safe alternative to the dry ports of Kuwait and Iran, and by smuggling consumer goods cargoes into Iran.

The trade sector in Dubai continues to benefit from a robust market economy and political stability, maintaining Dubai’s port as one of the busiest in the region. These efforts fashioned the city of Dubai as the most active business center in the Gulf, attracting investment from Europe and the Far East, to say nothing of its Arab neighbors. In the 1990s, Dubai fine-tuned its diversification efforts, positioning itself to abandon all oil dependency by 2010. Through shrewd and responsible investments in its own future, Dubai developed new, sustainable sources of income and new sectors such as retail and tourism.

**Taking the Initiative for Retail Tourism**

Dubai’s first innovations to welcome robust tourism began in the early 1980s under Sheikh Rashid. He delineated a strategic vision for the emirate in which tourism would encourage direct foreign investment and wider business development rather than simply function as an independent sector. Therefore, the initial developments were intended to target business travelers in western Europe and neighboring Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. These efforts included infrastructural and transportation developments, such as the establishment in 1985 of the state-owned Emirates Airlines. The government also set up the Dubai Commerce and Tourism Promotion Board (DCTPB)—a government body in charge of promoting Dubai’s status as an international destination.

By 1996, tourist arrivals reached 1.9 million, marking the success of the Sheikh’s primary strategies. The initial momentum encouraged additional policies to follow, such as the 1997 creation of the Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing (DTCM) which established “the principal authority for the planning, supervision and development of tourism in the emirate.” The government also legislated several successful pro-tourism policies, such as more liberal trade policies and the elimination of traditional dress code and alcohol consumption restrictions. The government also made a series of key facilities investments. Specifically, the development of several lavish hotels was aided by large involvement from state-owned international hotel chain brands, such as Jumeirah.

One of the most notable accommodations projects by Jumeirah was the Burj Al Arab, the futuristic hotel contained on its own island. The state-supported hotel offers a helicopter landing pad, gold iPads for every guest, chauffeur-driven Rolls Royces, and nightly room rates that start at around $1,780 USD. The majority of Dubai’s hotel development projects like the Burj Al Arab are marked by innovative, self-contained resorts which helped to brand Dubai’s tourism in the

The Burj Al Arab in Dubai. Creative Commons.
“Retail accounts for 29% of the emirate’s GDP, and the Dubai Shopping Festival is the single largest retail event of the year. It contributed approximately $4 billion to the Dubai economy from retail, hospitality, and travel expenditures in 2012.”

Dubai made a strong effort to encourage strategic partnerships between the government and private sector to guarantee the success of these massive projects. That open relationship between wealthy public and private firms helped attractions and events like the DSF thrive and evolve over time from public sector to tradable, private sector entities. In this way, Dubai has been able to lead the region in business innovation through its willingness to implement more open economic policies. On top of progressive economic policies, Dubai liberalized visa restrictions in 2001 which led to an immediate 30 percent uptick in the annual growth rate of tourist arrivals, accommodating a total of 4.7 million tourists that year. In 2006, within ten years of the creation of the DTCM and the DSF, Dubai welcomed over 6.4 million tourists.

**Inside the DSF’s Formation**

As established in the foregoing section, the government of Dubai went to many specific lengths to encourage tourism attractions of all types. The DSF was one of these endeavors: a shopping extravaganza intended to reduce the seasonality of tourism travel to Dubai, and to allow Muslim tourists and regional travelers to let off steam after four weeks of fasting during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan. Therefore, the timing of the festival shifts annually relative to the Gregorian calendar in common global use. The original idea of the festival was to utilize the existing fifteen shopping malls in Dubai to create a festival that would offer a combination of experiences other than just shopping—namely family entertainment and sweepstakes. The DSF then quickly became one of the world’s leading unique and creative event offerings due to a well-researched and systematically-planned package.

The first festival launched in 1996 was prepared in only forty-five days due to efforts taken by an organizing committee made up of general managers and directors of different corporate houses in Dubai. More than 160 nationalities made up the population of Dubai at the birth of the festival, allowing the planning committee to shape attractions for a variety of cultures—a flexibility that has remained one of the keys to its unique success.

Government backing also aided the DSF by facilitating waivers for event implementers to ease government regulations surrounding the production of the festival. Beginning with the first year of the festival, government-owned Emirates Airlines offered cut-rate flights and was deemed the official transporter of the event. The airline aids in promotional duties, which range from bearing the logo of the festival on its aircrafts to distributing festival brochures in-flight. The Dubai International Airport also accommodates visas designated to aid tourist travel for the DSF, and state officials arranged the mooring of Greek cruise ships in the emirate’s harbor to allow for more accommodations in the early years of the festival.

The government is also charged with providing the proper safety elements and public location management. The Dubai Metro Fashion Show is a specific instance in which government authorities annually aid the physical logistics of festival events. The fashion show takes place during the DSF within moving trains.
in the Dubai metro system with the models utilizing train cars as runway platforms.34 This event is organized in collaboration with the Roads and Transport Authority (RTA) to arrange special train lines, and the show is sponsored by private sector clothing retailer Bloomingdales. This collaboration perfectly illustrates the public-private partnership at the core of the DSF's success.

The Utility of the Festival Model for Dubai's Economy

The festival platform itself is a creative and advantageous method that helped to imprint Dubai as an international destination. Festivals are an age-old model that have been used worldwide to express a host nation's culture and technology, but the modern events marketing tools that the DSF utilizes bring the model of the festival successfully into the 21st century.35

Through its emphasis on hotel accommodations and entertainment, Dubai's festival model provides an enthralling, multifaceted setting for retail that captivates the consumer. Research has shown that shoppers focus on more than just the objects they purchase; their propensity to buy is very much shaped by their shopping experience and environment.36 A variety of multi-day events within the frame of a festival or Mega-event is the answer to this consumer, and therefore the genius of the DSF model.

The challenges of such a grandiose model are few but significant. A consistent integration between all actors in the festival—public sector, retailers, hospitality sector, public sector, and government authority bodies—is a necessary but not simplistic balance for the festival planning body (DFRSPE) to coordinate.37 However, the authoritative bodies most often work willingly in collaboration with the DFRSPE, in particular for the aforementioned Dubai Metro Fashion Show. The festival model is also challenged by the aim of maintaining customer loyalty during the obligatory one-year gap in between festivals.

However, the DSF still has an undeniable, distinct effect on Dubai's economy as a whole. Retail accounts for 29% of the emirate's GDP, and the DSF is the single largest retail event of the year.38 According to the DFRSPE, the DSF contributed approximately $4 billion to the Dubai economy from retail, hospitality, and travel expenditures in 2012. Over the last two decades in total, the festival has drawn over 56 million visitors to the emirate, and has resulted in total expenditures in retail, hospitality, and entertainment industries exceeding $39 billion.39

Heightened revenues during the festival are seen from retail to financial services, where profits are growing each year as the DSF continues to gain popularity.
The leading currency exchange company Al Fardan Exchange reported an 8-10% increase in currency exchange transactions during the first two weeks of the 2015 festival compared to the same period in 2014. The travel sector saw an increase of around 5% in hotel bookings and occupancy during the 2015 festival compared to the 2014 festival, and Emirates Airlines reported a 12% increase overall of travelers flying to Dubai during the DSF.

**Conclusion**

The DSF has helped to brand Dubai in the world market; while the majority of festival visitors still come from neighboring GCC countries like Saudi Arabia, the DSF has seen an increase in visitors from Europe, namely the UK and Russia. Dubai as a whole has seen major growth in tourism from non-Arab countries, with Europe and Asia leading the pack. From the most recent Dubai Statistics Center report from 2013, only about 3 million of the 9 million tourists total were from other regional Arab countries; 2.4 million were from Europe and 2.3 million were from Asia and Africa.

Through these bounds outside of the Arab world, Dubai now holds a permanent place in the international skyline. The emirate’s signature, futurist skyscraper-hotels are famed for their height and decadence. Dubai has grown from a bustling but small settlement into a world center in just a few short decades. While oil revenues functioned as the basis for expansion, the international reach and influence of Dubai was due wholly to its government’s shrewd liberal market initiatives. The DSF is the embodiment of these efforts, and of the lucrative intersection of retail and tourism. The two sectors reach beyond the bounds of their industries by benefitting the financial services sector and providing manifold opportunities for investment. The specific festival model provides a customizable experience for each individual consumer, defining the Dubai brand and helping to change the face of a young, underdeveloped state.

**ENDNOTES**

2. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid., 94.
11. Ibid., 97.
12. Ibid., 98.
16 Ibid., 99.
21 Ibid., 21.
26 Ibid., 27.
27 Ibid.
30 Ibid., 138.
31 Ibid., 140.
33 Bray, “Dubai Tries Hedging Its Oil-Thin Future with Six-Week Souk.”
35 Vel, Suhail, and Dokhan, “Events Marketing Model of Dubai Shopping Festival,” 139.
37 Vel, Suhail, and Dokhan, “Events Marketing Model of Dubai Shopping Festival,” 141.
42 International Festivals and Events Association. IFEA World Festival and Event City Winner 2015: Dubai. 57.
43 Deena Kamel Yousef, “DSF 2012 Rakes Dh14.7b during Festival Period.”
Sunni Islam’s Internal Ethnic Conflict
The Cognitive Dissonance Between Universal Faith and Ethnic Origination

Dr. Patrick James Christian

A psychoanalytical anthropologist specializing in ethnic conflict, Dr. Patrick James Christian received his doctorate in the psychopathology of ethnic and cultural conflict from Nova Southeastern University in 2015. Before that, he spent several years in the US Army as a Green Beret, earning such distinctions as the Bronze Star Medal for his service in Iraq. Currently, Christian serves as the senior US Social Scientist for NATO operations in Kabul, Afghanistan.
Few major religions tie the ethnic and historical identity of their first messengers and adherents to their central tenets as effectively as Islam. My awareness of this aspect of Islam began during time spent living within the contested divide between Arab and African versions of the Muslim ummah. Night after night, the Muslims conversing would argue their respective positions in circular logic with each position seeming to be rooted in a particular ethno-cultural perspective. Their clashing approaches appeared to conflict with attempts made by the Prophet Mohammed to raise his newly revealed message above the thick boundaries of the ties of blood and marriage. An enduring ethno-cultural divide in Muslim identity seemed to be evidenced by the ongoing dissonance of Islamic application in this non-Arab setting.
I identify two separate conceptual psychological “dissonances” within the Islamic identity as it emanates outward from its origins at Mecca and Medina—dissonances that are central to conflict discourse within the multi-ethnic Muslim ummah. These cleavages involve points of conflict in and of themselves and increase the conflict effect when combined. The first is the historical dissonance within the pre-Islamic Arab identity, involving psychological and cognitive imprinting of geography, geology, spirituality, and nomadic-sociocentric constructions of society. The second dissonance is between the pre-Islamic Arab identity and the new Islamic identity promulgated by Qur’anic revelations and the life of the Prophet.

The former suggests a society that was already internally conflicted prior to the Qur’anic revelations and the latter suggests that this conflict was deepened and then promulgated across vast spaces and into thousands of non-Arab cultures. The spread of a cultural religion that masquerades as a universal faith would create conditions for extended psychological and sociological conflict as each affected culture works to sort out the difference between (unwanted) foreign culture and (wanted) universal faith.

The foregoing is not intended as a pejorative conceptualization of Islam. Rather, a careful reading of the Islamic faith suggests a divide between what Mohammed intended and what eventually emerged from the Arabian Peninsula. I suggest that most, if not all, religious faiths begin deeply imbedded within the culture from which they emanated. Some, like the Christian faith, become so acculturated across sociological psychological states of being that their central progenitors change ethnicity, race, language, or even gender depending on the needs of their adherents. The Islamic faith, on the other hand, never moved beyond its Arab roots. The faith is inseparable from the linguistic constructions found in the Arabic language of the Qur’an, and from the cultural context of the testified example (sunnah) and speech (hadith) of the Prophet Mohammed.

The comparison of the conflicted Arab identity against the image of a trans-tribal, universalistic Islam provides the basis of research for this paper. The hypothesis is that the Islamic identity that emanated from the Arabian Desert consisted and consists of primary archetypes that are in constant states of cognitive dissonance, a condition exacerbated by interaction with non-Arab ethnicities. With this paper, I suggest that the Islamic archetype remains in perpetual dissonance with the original Bedouin spirituality and the Arab ethnicity of historical origination and that collectively the two halves continue to create even greater dissonance as they cross the Arab-to-other ethnic cultural boundary.

As a religious text, the Qur’an engaged both the metaphysical hereafter and the physical present of individual, family and society. This contrasted with Christianity, a faith that surrendered the physical present in favor of the metaphysical hereafter and with Judaism, which focused on the earthly ordering of Jewish society. Unlike the Christian Gospels, the

“The revelations of the Qur’an served a dual purpose: change to the existing social order and change to the existing spiritual order. Had these two objectives been realized, they would have negated the central archetypes of Arab ethnic identity.”
Qur’an does not rely on earlier texts for its context, but is self-contained in describing the past, the present and the metaphysical future. The importance of these points is that the revelations of the Qur’an served a dual purpose: change to the existing social order and change to the existing spiritual order. The combination of these two objectives, had they been realized in their fullest form, would have conceivably negated the central archetypes of Arab ethnic identity in much the same manner that the spread of the new Christian identity negated the originating Jewish ethnic identity of its new adherents. This leaves a question of the fulfillment of original Qur’anic intent—an intent that I argue was ultimately subverted by the pressures of ethnic identity and historical origination.

**The Cognitive Dissonance of Arab Identity in a Pre-Islamic Context**

By the time of Mohammed’s first revelation in 610 C.E. during the month of Ramadan, the tribes of the Arabian Peninsula constituted two distinctive sociological structures that were nonetheless linked together by common historical origination and a symbiotic relationship.

The first was that of the *badawah* (Bedouin), which was generally acknowledged to be, if not the ideal, then at least the original Arab culture. The second was that of the *hadarah* (sedentary society) consisting of tribes settled in established towns and cities, supported by farming, trading and support of the cross desert caravans. It is the *hadarah* that figures most prominently in the Qur’an and the hadith, as Mohammed and his family were of the sedentary Quraysh tribe of the city of Mecca. But it is the *badawah* that ultimately transmitted the Qur’an throughout the Arabian Peninsula and extended the geography of Arab-Islam north into the Levant and south into the Maghreb and the Horn of Africa.

The evolution of nomadic herder, trader, and hunter-gatherer to the collectivism of agro-pastoralism is not unique to Arab society. Within the normal evolution of societies across this developmental spectrum, the archetypes of individual and family identity change as part of normal construction and reconstruction – albeit in many cases, violently. Two underlying sociological issues continuously surface as part of the explanations for the ethnoreligious interplay in the conflicted Islamic identity. The first issue involves the effects of cognitive imprinting on nomadic society that can be found in all such sociological structures regardless of ethnicity or religious tradition. The second issue involves the encapsulation of a communal identity in the early stages of evolution from nomadic to sedentary into a religious faith promulgated as trans-tribal and universal in application.
The Geographic, Geologic, and Climatologic Effects of Sociological Development

The popular historical narrative of the Arab peoples placed their origins in Ishmael, the first-born son of Abraham, descendent of Noah of the Jewish book of Genesis. Ishmael and his mother Hagar are cast out from the house of Abraham by his first wife Sarah after the unexpected birth of Abraham’s second son, Isaac, father of the Israelites. So the story describes an ancient journey by mother and son into the Arabian wilderness to a place near Jiddah, on the Red Sea coast, where they are saved from the desert by a miraculous well at a place that will be known as Mecca. Missing from most accounts is the physical context of geography, geology, and climate, and their effects on human cognition, identity formation, and cultural expression.

The Arabian Peninsula is covered by vast deserts, lava flows, and semi-arid grazing lands that grow and die with the semi-circular annual rainfalls. The geography and climate (then and now) supported the development of pastoral forms of socioeconomic life combined with servicing the established trade routes that crisscrossed the Arabian Peninsula. Oases, wellsprings, and constructed cisterns allowed for some measures of agro-pastoralism and a slow evolvement of sedentary communities into a few city-state structures. These sovereign, autonomous civil communities were usually dominated by one or more clans adhering to hereditary structures of hierarchy for both family and tribe. This was the case in Mecca, controlled by the tribe of Quraysh and to its north, and in the the city-state town of Yathrib, controlled by sons of Aws and Khazraj, two feuding Arab tribes whose attempts at power sharing often resulted in open violence. Over time, those tribes whose basis of existence included ownership of one or more city-states flourished economically relative to those tribes and clans whose entire life-cycle was bound up in pastoralism and trade caravans. Fixed agro-pastoralism was possible only in relative proximity to the sources of water, although camel livestock (but not horses or other domesticated animals) could exist for long stretches of time on the small amounts of growth found naturally in the arid plains between desert sands. This, plus their ability to store weeks’ worth of water and nutrients, transformed them into a family and a tribe’s capital wealth investment.

The importance of this explanation of Arab socio-economic structural life is that despite the divergence of Arab life into separate states of sociological structures of life (hadarah-sedentary and badawah-Bedouin) the focal points of both structures remained the desert, survival, and tribal affiliation. Nearly all tribes and even clans straddled both hadarah-city and badawah-desert sociological life, with the wealthier clans in the city and poorer clans in the Bedouin camp. Like life rafts in the endless sea of sand, the water sources and city-states around them were focal points for both hadarah and badawah communities, with tribal ties determining the mode and rationality for watering rights distribution and grazing. This description of life in the desert underlies the pre-Islamic crises of identity that were to serve as a vehicle for Islamic evangelization. On the one hand, the nomadic Bedouin (badawah) looked inward to the lights of the city, seeing in them a reflection of wealth and safety that they might never attain. On the other hand, the settled elites (hadarah) of the clan and tribe looked outward to the desert, seeing in it the freedom and nobility that their security and comfort had forfeited:

The ancestors’ way of life had been the nobler one, the life of tent-dwellers, often on the move. Nobility and freedom were inseparable, and the nomad was free. In the desert a man was conscious of being the lord of space, and in virtue of that lordship he escaped in a sense from the domination of time. But the townsman was a prisoner; and to be fixed in one place – yesterday, today, tomorrow – was to be a target for time, the ruiner of all things.
A Bedouin caravan crossing the desert in Central Arabia. Wikimedia Commons.

The cognitive dissonance for the Arabs involved a complex failure of identity archetype transformation from the specific ordering of life in the desert (badawah) to the specific ordering of life in communal sedentary social clusters. The former ordering is based wholly on the natural circumstance of a defined geographical and climatic environment that cannot be adapted at will. The latter ordering is socially constructed by communities with standards of success that are artificially constructed outside of individual competition with nature. Cognitive dissonance refers to a painful and potentially debilitating psychological state of mind that occurs when an individual or group holds belief ideations that are either in direct conflict with each other or with reality.7 Such people and groups “find themselves doing things that don’t fit with what they know, or having opinions that do not fit with other opinions they hold.”8 Hadarah members of Arab tribes split between the freedom of the desert and the comfort of the city were a transitory society perpetually conflicted by their identity as desert dwellers and the direction of their sociological evolution towards constructed society. Their conflict can be observed in their socio-cultural practices, especially as they relate to generational transmission of archetypal transmitted enough badawah heritage and identity that, as a young man, he was already accomplished at guiding caravans across vast desert spaces without loss or incident.

Sociological structures go to great lengths to reduce the effects of identity dissonance and discontinuity of primal archetypes. Social leaders and entrepreneurs reduce dissonance effects by altering existing sociological conditions and creating bridging belief systems that allow them to continue holding onto outmoded identity archetypes that are not grounded in present reality. For example, hadarah society in the 7th century created complex explanations of the spiritual and physical benefits of sending their infant male children to be suckled and raised by poor Bedouin relatives:

This interchange of benefits between townsman and nomad was in the nature of things, for each was poor where the other was rich, and rich where the other was poor. The nomad had the age-old God-given way of life to offer, the way of Abel. The sons of Cain—for it was Cain who built the first villages—had possessions and power.10

identity. Male children of hadarah city dwellers placed their children with badawah clansmen to be raised in Bedouin fashion for the formative years of their development:

It was the custom of all the great families of Arab towns to send their sons, soon after their birth, into the desert, to be suckled and weaned and spend part of their childhood amongst one of the Bedouin tribes.9

Mohammad’s own Bedouin foster family

Sunni Islam’s Internal Ethnic Conflict
In such explanations, the uncertainty of the rightness of their departure from the desert to the traditionally corrupted nature of constructed settled life was ever present in the minds of the hadarah families and encouraged them to respect their poorer brethren who chose to remain in the traditional ways of Abel. Even in modern Arab societies, settled urban families and professionals often look to the archetype of the Bedouin as a central tenet of their ethnic and cultural identity. In the 7th century then, it was settled hadarah city life that would have been the abnormal social construction, and its early architects would have endeavored to ensure that all possible badawah identity archetypes would have been incorporated into any new identity constructions regardless of cost or consequence.\(^1\) This is the reason that then and now, Bedouins matter: not their physical presence, but the lingering emanations of who they were and what they believed that have been subsequently knit into the tenets of Islam and into the deepest reaches of Arab ethnic identity.

**Bedouin Archetypes of Family Survival**

Then and now, Arab cultural identity construction is based on ancient modes of austere socioeconomic life of Bedouin archetypes, a condition that was exaggerated by its incorporation into the Qur'an and Hadith of the Islamic faith. The centrality of the Bedouin archetype in Arab identity and its unavoidable incorporation into the Islamic faith are evidenced as much by Islamic conflict and violence as by normative Arab cultural expression. Even as the hadarah Arab tribes settled into villages and towns, creating economies, social structures and the moral basis necessary to support the evolution of a sedentary identity, the badawah Arab tribes resisted. Despite the change of parts of clan and tribe from badawah to hadarah, both desert dweller and townsman retained rituals and traditions formulated over millennia spent surviving in the desert. The sociological structures that allowed for life to develop without water, without agriculture, and without permanent abode required psychological conditions of fulfillment not found in other types of settled societies. The sociological structure of Bedouin life produced profound psychological emanations of ritual and tradition:

The theme of perpetual loss and ruin, as the ‘substance’ of this tradition resonated differently within Bedouin and sedentary societies. For the nomads, loss and dying were regular norms of nature; they needed no metaphysical camouflage, and the ode [spiritual poems of Arab Bedouin life] did not venture to offer any. Only the language of mourning itself mitigated the loss.\(^2\)

Bedouin identity archetypes originated in the construction of a "society with no surplus production and no class distinctions, an economy of bare and uncertain survival reflecting itself directly in the

Christian argues that the universalistic message of the Qur’an was subverted by Bedouin tribal values. Wikimedia Commons.
“Then and now, Bedouins matter...the lingering emanations of who they were and what they believed [have been] knit into the tenets of Islam and into Arab ethnic identity.”

culture, a social equality of chances of fortune and misfortune and thus no hidden secrets of survival.”

The violence of the open desert and the ever-present prospect of physical annihilation would unsurprisingly create sociological structures eminently durable and capable of filling tremendous psychological needs of self-denial, loss, and uncertainty. Over time, the collective memory of survival, love and loss that were stored in tribal poems would magnify into a desert spirituality that matched the ruthlessness of starvation, thirst, and endless foraging for survival. This ideation argues that badawah resistance to the haddarah sociological structure was more than mere adaptive preference against something they could not have. Rather, their resistance lay in their inability to abandon the defining characteristics of a spirituality that had nurtured, sustained and memorialized them for unknown millennia. And it was this same desert Bedouin spirituality that Mohammed’s revelations would unsuccessfully attempt to subdue in favor of Islam.

Given the sharing of the Bedouin archetypes by the haddarah townspeople as central tenets of their Arab identity, it is not surprising that in the construction of Islam, sufficient accommodations or compromises would be made to allow for (uneasy) coexistence between Islam’s central tenet of universal trans-tribalism and the tribal desert spirituality of its new Bedouin adherents and protectors. For the badawah tribes, acceptance of Islam changed little. Their agreement to recognize Mohammed as God’s final prophet was as much political as spiritual and the moral basis for their nomadic identity remains unchanged to this day; this is easily observable in the Bedouin tribes of Arabia, North Africa, and the Horn of Africa. As the core of Mohammed’s evangelizing army consisted of these same Bedouins, the case is deepened that the Islam spread by Bedouin conquerors bore distinct differences from the universal model revealed in the Qur’an.

**Bedouin Spirituality and Cognitive Imprinting of Desert Dwellers**

It can be argued that mere survival in the open desert creates an accompanying spirituality that is necessary just to explain the improbability of one’s continued existence. The desert is not simply another environment of human habitat; “it is a sphere of absolute speechlessness. What is strange in the desert is speaking, thinking in words, dialogizing, communicating.” In the desert, time is an abstraction suited only to epochal events that punctuate poetic recitations of mythic historical narrative that serves as the foundation for spiritual gnosis. All existential identity, proof of past existence and present lives, lives on only within the oral history that binds the many tribes together. The austerity of the desert leaves little room for anything in the minds and hearts of men that is not central to the spirituality of existential survival. Spiritual life, like desert life, has little need for time, agendas, or appointments. One does not wait to meet someone in the desert, nor in the domain of spirituality. Neither single humans nor caravans perceive the utility in exact beginnings and exact endings, shrouded as they are by distance, heat, and dust. The magnitude of space and the emptiness within the desert obviates the possibilities of knowing; distance collapses and time expands to the point that maps of the immediate world become meaningless. This is the essence of spirituality of the desert and psychological imprinting of cognition from geological spaces too vast to comprehend in the absence of intermediary markers such as mountains, forests, rivers, lakes, and the diversity of human and natural terrain.
Bedouin spirituality grew out of this geography, where base survival in an inescapable, unchanging climate was a spiritual act little related to the will of humans fortunate enough to still be amongst the living at the end of the day. The initial Bedouin spirituality that exalted the timeless ethics of survival in desert nomad life was reinforced as those tribes adapting to sedentary life created outgroup competition. As the alternative to nomadic life took root, Bedouin spirituality took on a moral dimension, condemning sedentary challenges to fatalistic acceptance of what dahr (epochal time) would bring with certainty.

Bedouin spiritual philosophy expresses itself most clearly in the “belief in the relative profanity of all subjective rearrangement of the norms of nature, norms from which the idea of a possibly different future is absent. This view is based in the feeling that unchosen frames of social existence possess a claim to timeless and superior stability that surpasses the claims to stability of frames of existence chosen during an individual lifespan.”16 It was not so much the advent of Islam that the Bedouin railed against as the fundamental change in moral responsibility for directing human life best left to the finitudes of dahr. The Bedouins did eventually accept Islam as a component of their tribal identity, subordinated and placed in the perspective of nomadic life, but rejected or ignored those elements that did not fit within the existing psychological framework of life in the open desert. The struggle between the evangelizers of universal Islam and the Arab identity as expressed by its prototypical badawah society continues, finding its way into most conflicts where Arab identity and Islam vie for primary salience.

**Interpreting Islam through Arab Historical Origination and Ethnic Ownership**

The final section of this paper suggests that the interpretation of Islam is itself conflicted and is a cause of conflict both within and without the Arab ethnic boundaries of the Muslim ummah. There are compelling historical arguments that Islam never fully subsumed the prototypical Arab tribal ethos that developed over millennia of severe deprivation—even though it tried mightily to do so.17 As Karen Armstrong writes, “from the very beginning, Mohammed’s religion was diametrically opposed to some of the [Bedouins’] essential principles.”18 The primary jihad or struggle of Islam was always against the Arab tribes’ attachment to their chivalric code, known in Arabic as muruwaḥ. This code is a complex ideation of individual and group identity that evolved from generations of bitter subsistence survival in the open desert. It entails a stoic acceptance of suffering, and a rigid commitment to avenging wrongs and defying enemies.19 The survival and continued influence of muruwaḥ results in identity dissonance, because the placement of Islam as a subordinate feature of the tribe’s Arab ethnicity has the effect of negating the universality of the Islamic social ordering force. This creates internal conflict because Islam claims not to be merely a personal spiritual faith but rather a complete reordering of social values, family hierarchy, and human relationships.
The social reorganization of Islam was to have begun at the foundation of Arab tribal life: the parents’ relationship to the child. The ability of Islam, or other organized religion, to call individual members of a family outside of the thickly bounded sociocentric circle of life was and is to many, an existential threat to the archetype of family identity: absolute cohesion in the face of annihilation. The movement of children in love, marriage and family is perhaps the central socio-political function of segmented lineage forms of society (clans and tribes). Marriage arrangements between sons and daughters, nephews and nieces, were not issues of romance and individual happiness. These arrangements prevented or halted violent communal conflicts. They staved off and prevented starvation of families. Arrangements of marriage created dense, social, ethnic, family affiliations that would ensure survival and transmission of existential memory across generational inheritance. They were literally the mechanisms by which clans, tribes and segmented lineage were socially constructed back to time immemorial – the highest creations of tribal cultural expression. Mohammed’s Islam threatened the continuation of the tribe, threatened the existential survival of family memory and patriarchal control. If God could command Ja’far and ‘Ali to leave their father Abu Lahab, if Islam could separate Nawfal from his son Aswad, would then the Arab tribes be forced to choose between family, clan, and tribe versus an unknown, uncertain community of God?

The Islamic reorganization of society would, if unchecked, eventually include inter-family, inter-clan and inter-tribal connectivity based upon spiritually constructed ties rather than those of blood and marriage arrangements between patriarchal leaders. When physical, violent resistance by tribal-societal leadership of the clans and tribes failed and Mohammed consolidated his control over most of the remaining tribes to include his native Quraysh, tribal leaders quickly found that from the inside, they could protect the tribal system in ways not possible from the outside. Once all of the tribes’ members were safely inside the Islamic ummah, the patriarchal social management of family, clan and tribe replaced any emergence of individual self-governance under a new system of relationship between God and person. As new entrants into the Muslim ummah, family, clan and tribal leaders restored their paternal sociocentric control over bloodlines, pushing the Prophet Mohammed to incorporate sanctifications of blood and marriage relationship that would shift the Qur’an from its egalitarian roots back to sociocentric orientation of social life with a new Islamic flavor to augment, but not replace the old desert spirituality.

All new religions are constructed from the rubble of those spiritual structures they replace; and sometimes the rubble of past religious belief colors and modifies the new in unintended ways. Central to the desert spirituality of the Bedouin archetype was the concept of jahiliyyah, which is poorly translated to mean an Arab man’s self-concept of his warrior-honor-machismo social identity. This identity trait was supposed to have been subsumed by the Islamic trait of hilm (forbearance), which laid the basis for more orderly and structured communities based less on force of arms and more on development of natural and human resources supported by developing infrastructure. The time that I spent studying and observing Arab tribes in Africa provided a comparison and contrast between historical accounts of early Arab life and society and the reality of Bedouin life in the Sahel. Like their ancient Arab prototypes, the spirituality of Africa’s Bedouin tribes is rooted in their pride of survival, willingness to avenge any wrong committed

“Qurayshi tribal lineage is of paramount importance to the establishment of political legitimacy within the Islamic ummah, despite claims to universalist egalitarianism.”
upon their members and protection of their “chivalric code, which, by giving meaning to their lives and preventing them from succumbing to despair in … harsh conditions, performed the essential function of religion.”

The Arab elites in power on the Arabian Peninsula have used their tribal lineage to accord themselves rights of interpreting the Qur’an and especially, the hadith, laden as they are with references to Arab culture and social structure. Their claims of lineage to the family of the Prophet provide a theoretical base of legality for ruling their particular political state, as God’s representatives over their tribes and lands. These claims to be physical descendants of the Prophet have provided them with a powerful weapon to maintain ruling authority over the Muslim ummah. Part of this authority is rooted in the expected arrival of a final savior of Islam, or Mahdi. Religious opinions emanating from the World Muslim League in Mecca have reaffirmed the belief in a Mahdi as central—even obligatory—to the Islamic faith. While not specifically mentioning the term, entries in the Qur’an provide a detailed description of the expected Mahdi in terms of genetic provenance of lineage to the original Prophet Mohammad:

He will be an Arab, from the clan of Banû Hâshim started by the great-grandfather of Mohammad (Hâshim), who was of the Quraysh Tribe, and of the Adnani Tribal Federation. He will be from the descendants of the Prophet Mohammed through his daughter Fatima. He will be the descendant of Husayn, son of Fatima and ‘Ali.

This is just one illustration of the ways in which Qurayshi tribal lineage is important to the establishment of reverence within the Islamic ummah, despite claims to universalist egalitarianism. Every clan or tribe in the Muslim ummah has a constructed story within their historical narrative that (at times tortuously) explains in complex detail, the bloodline relationship back to the tribe of the Prophet Mohammad. For example, two men from the tribe of Quraysh, possibly even of the clan of Banû Hâshim, made their way south as emigrants and after ending up near the town of Berbera, took wives from one of the local clans. Their offspring became the two great northern clans of Somalia and through intermarriage, provided all of the important clans with a plausible linkage back to the line of the Prophet. This anecdote is endlessly repeated by sub-cultural identity groups within the Muslim ummah where the veracity of claims is most often hotly debated in sessions between Arab and non-Arab claimants. The hierarchical ownership of lineage purity has always been a central facet of Arab Muslim identity, and all claims by others only dilute their pride of placement in the global ummah. The belief that Islam was revealed expressly for them by one of their members is a powerful part of self-worth and natural leadership within Arabia and beyond. And in this way, the tribe-centric values of the badawah live on wherever Islam is found today.

ENDNOTES

1 The reason that this is not intended as pejorative is that all faiths suffer faulty promulgation at the hands of imperfect humans; faulting human interpretation and practice of a perfect ideal does not diminish the ideal, but recognizes the limitations of those who would apply divine revelation.

2 The Qur’an does align its new adherents at children of Ishmael, son of Abraham, a tenet that lays claim to the Jewish God of the Israelites. The Qur’an however, extends Genesis to a deeper point in the lives of the Muslim ummah with the creation of the central physical object of both Arab (pre-Islamic) and Islamic religious faith; the construction of the Ka’bah by Abraham and his son Ishmael at the direction of God using a pure celestial stone of metaphysical origin. In this way, the Qur’an validates pre-existing belief even as it reorders that belief for the future.

3 The formerly nomadic hunter-gatherer First Nation peoples of Australia, the Arctic regions, and North America demonstrate the degree to which geographic, geologic, and climatologic cognitive imprinting reinforces central identity archetypes, complicating adaptation to the realities of sociological change.

4 Geography in Islamic idealization consists of the Holy sites of Mecca (burial site of Ishmael, son of Abraham, who links Arabs to God by right of paternal lineage). Also, the Haj or Journey, began as the circumambulation of the Holy Rock.
of Mecca, which itself was related to the circumnavigation of the Arabian Peninsula on an annual basis by the pre-Islamic Muslim community. Geology in Islamic idealization refers to the desert and its life-giving oasis and well springs, such as the one at the Holy Rock in Mecca, reputedly placed there by God in order to save the life of Ishmael and his mother Hagar after Abraham’s first wife Sarah forced them from the patriarch’s camp.

5 Upon Mohammed’s flight of Mecca to avoid persecution at the hands of his fellow tribesmen, his successful mediation of the conflict in Yathrib and subsequent conversion of the inhabitants to Islam would establish that city-state as the seat of the new religion with the humble name of ‘the City’ or al-Medina.

6 (Lings 2006, 23)
7 (Festinger 1957)
8 (Spencer and Meyers 2006)
9 (Lings 2006, 23)
10 (Lings 2006, 24)
11 This example can be seen in the unqualified sedentary Arab support to the al-Misriyah baggara (cattle herding) clans in northern Kordofan and the Rizeigat aballa (camel herding) tribes in northern Darfur against sedentary African tribes. Other current examples include the maintenance by wealthy Arab hadarah clans of their poorer relatives as modern-day hadawah families whose primary occupation is the preservation of realistic Bedouin encampments complete with tents, generators, televisions, and herds of camels and other livestock.

12 (Bamyeh 1999, 84)
13 (Bamyeh 1999, 84)
14 (Izutsu 2002)
15 (Bamyeh 1999, 3)
16 (Bamyeh 1999, 62)
17 (Armstrong 2006) and (Bamyeh 1999)
18 (Armstrong 2006, 34)
19 (Izutsu 2002)
20 Jahiliyyah – Irascibility: an acute sensitivity to honor and prestige; arrogance, excess and a chronic tendency to violence and retaliation. “Jahili people where too proud to make the surrender of Islam; why should a karim moderate his behavior and act like a slave (abd), praying with his nose on the ground and treating the base-born like equals?” (Armstrong 2006, 67).

21 (Bamyeh 1999)
22 (Armstrong 2006, 12)
23 (Khaldun 1969)
24 al-Kutub, al-Sittah. 2004

The Dubai Shopping Festival  59
CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

1. We welcome submissions from undergraduate and graduate students from all universities and disciplines.

2. We accept submissions year-round. Authors will be notified in the spring and fall of the status of their submission.

3. Send submissions to: submissions@alnoorjournal.org.

4. Each paper should be submitted in Microsoft Word format.

5. Academic papers should be approximately 8,000 words. Features and essays should be approximately 1,500 words.

6. Authors are encouraged to submit any photography, art, or graphics pertaining to their pieces.

7. Please submit a title page containing your paper title, full name, school, department, year of graduation, and pertinent contact information.

8. Papers should be formatted using Chicago Citation Style with endnotes and a complete bibliography. Pages should also be numbered.

9. Possible topics are any subject relating to the history, religion, culture, art, and politics of the greater Middle East.

10. Examples of the types of papers that may be submitted are past or current research projects, relevant classroom papers, and senior theses.

Thank you. We look forward to reading your submissions.
For more information on the journal, please visit us at www.bcalnoor.org or email us at eic@alnoorjournal.org.