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Nonviolence, Duty, and Compulsion in Syria

Jawdat Said [1931–2022]

> *War has died!*
>
> [*al-ḥarb mātat*; Said, 2013]

No account of the variety of principled pacifism and nonviolence in contemporary Islam would be complete without giving serious consideration to the late Jawdat Said [*jawdat saʿīd*; d. 2022]. 'Of all current Muslim pacifist intellectuals [he] is incontestably the most outspoken voice . . . He is even known as the Gandhi of the Arabs . . . [and is] in the Arabic speaking countries . . . the foremost advocate of non-violence' [Belhaj, 2017: 230]. This Syrian intellectual and author of Circassian heritage spent half a century arguing and preaching in favour of nonviolent action and against the legitimacy of force. His writing on Islamic nonviolence is voluminous, inaugurated by his seminal *madhhab ibn ādam al-awwal* – conventionally translated as *The Doctrine of the First Son of Adam* ['first' in this case denotes more qualitative than chronological priority in referring specifically to Abel rather than to his fratricidal brother – who is often regarded as the elder]. Said's life, beginning under French Mandate rule and encompassing time spent living in the rival regional powers of Egypt and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, reflected the array of tumultuous historical developments which played out around him. It would do a disservice to the sophistication and sincerity of his

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theological reflections to present him simply as reacting to that succession of failed revolutions and betrayed political hopes. Yet one would be remiss in failing to address them directly. After all, even the peacefully productive Golan beehives he would tend in his later years stood in the shadow of both Israeli artillery and profound Ba'athist suspicion.

If Said's numerous imprisonments by the Syrian government do not bear witness to the political sensitivity of his intellectual engagements, the degree to which revolutionary groups in the so-called Arab Spring (including some interviewed for this book [see Chapter 7]) drew inspiration from him and from his teachings must surely do so. Those teachings, as we will see, represent not only a sustained effort in Islamic nonviolent thought but a distinctive approach which differs from others discussed here as much as it concurs with them. Ali Shariati [Chapter 4] is often the most salient point of comparison and contrast, though Said's conclusions culminate not in socialism but in a liberalism as progressive as that of Wahiduddin Khan [Chapter 5] is conservative. Like all others discussed in this study, however, Said's uncompromising commitment to personal moral improvement and the duty to act upon it is constant. This remains true irrespective of the fact that it is articulated not by any commitment to Sufism [cf. Chapters 3 and 5] but instead by the enduring influence of critical sociological theory – particularly that springing from modern Algeria: from Malek Bennabi [d. 1973] to Muhammad Arkoun [2010] and Pierre Bourdieu [see Appendix].

UPHEAVAL, AUTOCRITIQUE, AND CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

Jawdat Said was born in 1931 in the hamlet of *Bi'r 'Ajam* [lit. 'the non-Arabs' wellspring', so-named because of its historically large Circassian community] in the vicinity of the now-ruined city of Quneitra. Both now fall within the United Nations-administered demilitarised zone of the Golan Heights between Israel and Syria, but even then borders were in flux. The Sanjaks of Ottoman Syria had, after the First World War, been replaced by the French-controlled League of Nations Mandate – itself following the contours of the secret Anglo-French Sykes–Picot Agreement of 1916. The Syrian Republic had only been declared the year before Said's birth, but though a treaty of formal independence was concluded in 1936, French occupation would continue until after the Second World War. The final French withdrawal, in fact, roughly coincided with Said's own decision at the age of fifteen to move to Egypt so as to complete his studies at the venerable mosque-university of al-Azhar in Cairo: a centre

of learning which was old when the first colleges of Paris, Oxford, and Bologna were young. Said would spend much of the next decade in Egypt, and this experience was evidently a formative one. This is true not simply by virtue of his education at the world's pre-eminent institution of Sunni religious learning. Nor was it only the vertiginous rise in social standing that this often entailed: like most of al-Azhar's students at the time, he had come from 'rural and modest origins' [Zeghal, 1999: 376] before entering that storied academy. Still more was at play than the inevitable widening of horizons entailed by a move from rustic isolation to the region's most populous and cosmopolitan conurbation. All of these certainly played their part, of course. However, the late 1940s and 1950s were also a time of tremendous upheaval in national and regional culture and politics. The years Said spent in Egypt were formative not only of his own personality but of much of modern history.

While Said attended lectures at al-Azhar, both Egypt and the Middle East transformed around him. As the French withdrew from Syria so also were the British forced out of Mandatory Palestine – itself replaced in 1948 by the new State of Israel. Both Said's homeland of Syria and his new home in Egypt joined Iraq and Transjordan in dispatching armies in a vain attempt at aborting the Zionist project. Not only regular soldiers travelled to Palestine to fight, moreover, but also volunteers organised by other groups. Among these, most crucially for both the history of Egypt and the biography of Said, was the Society of the Muslim Brothers. Founded in Ismailia in 1928 by the schoolteacher Hassan al-Banna [ḥasan al-bannā'], the Muslim Brotherhood claimed millions of members by the time Said arrived in Cairo. It was already well on its way to forming the main current of twentieth-century political and religious counterculture in Egypt. Its armed involvement in the first Arab–Israeli War, moreover, proved to the Egyptian state that it presented more than a purely ideological challenge. The discovery of a significant cache of munitions on the Ismailia estate of Shaykh Muhammad Farghali, 'leader of the Brotherhood's battalions in Palestine' [Mitchell, 1993: 64], in October 1948 removed all doubt. Prime Minister Mahmoud al-Nokrashy Pasha ordered the dissolution and outlawing of the Brotherhood in December of that year [Calvert, 2013: 121–122]. By the end of the month the prime minister had been murdered by a university student and member of the Brotherhood. Hassan al-Banna's attempts at distancing the organisation from this assassination while seeking talks with the government ended soon after in his own killing by agents of the state [Mitchell, 1993: 71].

One can well imagine the effect that these events might have had on a young Jawdat Said. Not only was he experiencing tremendous transitions in his own life – into adulthood and with it the status of an Azhar-educated scholar – but all around him political and ideological lines were shifting. In both the countries of his birth and of his education, beyond them throughout the tumultuous Middle East, and indeed in the global arena, empires fell and rose. The ethico-political questions of authority and legitimacy were everywhere discussed and contested. This tumult left an imprint on his approach to religion, which from an early age concerned itself not only with the hereafter but with the here and now:

Indeed the events of the age in which I have lived, since the second world war, leave one no option but to distinguish between sovereignty and exploitation [*al-siyādah wa al-istighlāl*], and to confront this question: is exploitation the foundation of sovereignty? [Said, 2002: 118]

One must always be wary of the seductive tendency to impose neatly simple narratives upon the lives of others: tales with dramatically appealing instants of origin, inspiration, and transformation. It would also, once more, do a disservice to the depth of Said's thought and the breadth of his experience to reduce his life's work to such moments of crisis. Nonetheless, it is clear from Said's own recollections that his student experience in Egypt was formative. Writing decades later, he makes clear not only that he (and his fellow students) sympathised more with the Brotherhood than with the government, but that he felt personally repulsed by their resort to violence:

Where was the impetus to write this book [*madhhab ibn ādam al-awwal*] born in me? I was a student in Egypt, at al-Azhar. That day, the students flocked to class after the break between lessons, saying: '[Prime Minister] al-Nokrashy has been killed!' They may have been delighted as they said this, but I felt no elation. Rather, my feelings were ambiguous and I was ill at ease, for this is no way to solve a problem. [Said, 2007a]

The next years of Said's stay in Egypt would witness more seismic upheavals. The Free Officers revolution would overthrow the monarchy of King Farouk in 1952. The new president, General Mohamed Naguib, would soon find himself ousted by his former ally Lieutenant Colonel Gemal Abdel Nasser. A failed Muslim Brotherhood assassination attempt against President Nasser in 1954 would result in redoubled suppression of that Islamist movement. Nasser's 1956 nationalisation of the strategic Suez Canal would lead to the doomed Tripartite Aggression [*al-ʿudwān al-thulāthī*] of Britain, France, and Israel to reclaim it. The dramatic result

of the Suez Crisis would be humiliation for the declining imperial powers and glory for the ascendant Arab nationalist dictator and darling of the Afro-Asian Bandong Conference. Yet none of these dramas would impact Said more strongly than the arrival in Egypt that same year of the celebrated Algerian thinker Malek Bennabi, whose work would have an enduring impact upon him.

Bennabi's work had a catalysing effect, bringing together the widening circles of Said's reading. Said was during these formative years not only an observer of current events but also a scholar of wide-ranging appetites with access to some of the region's finest libraries. Not only did he share widespread public dissatisfaction with the secular and religious authorities of the time, he sought through his reading to find a new path forward. Like so many reform-minded men of his generation, Said admired the work of Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī [d. 1897], ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Kawākibī [d. 1902; e.g. Said, 1993a: 67], and Said's fellow Azharite Muḥammad ʿAbduh [d. 1905]. An even greater influence, more often cited throughout his work, came from further afield. It was in Cairo that Said immersed himself in the work of South Asian poet-philosopher and friend to Bacha Khan [see Chapter 2] Sir Muhammad Iqbal [d. 1938] – widely known by the honorific *ʿAllāma*, the most learned. Iqbal was a modernising Muslim reformer who turned his prodigious intellect and elite European education to the service of anti-imperial national liberation. His *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, which Said read in translation as *iʿādat bināʾ al-fikr al-dīnī fī al-islām*, is still widely appreciated by Muslims the world over – including in his day the Iranian thinker Ali Shariati [see Chapter 4]. Iqbal seemed to many – evidently including Said – to embody precisely the sort of cosmopolitan Islamic scholar who would not allow himself to be held back by conformism or by tribalism but would instead pursue the highest knowledge irrespective of its provenance. He offered a ray of hope, which Said's exposure to Malek Bennabi's 1948 *Les Conditions de la Renaissance*/*Shurūṭ al-Nahḍah* crystallised into a social critique.

Bennabi's self-critical psychologisation of the lamentably 'colonisable' condition [*colonisabilité*; *qābiliyyat lil-istiʿmār*; Said, 2013] of 'the post-Almohad spirit' [Bennabi, 2006: 82] greatly affected Said. It convinced him that the boundary-crossing intellectual achievements of luminaries such as Iqbal and Afghānī not only distinguished them from their fellows. Rather, they also highlighted their contemporaries' failures. One's attention must be turned, he concluded, to the rule itself rather than to those exceptions which prove it. Bennabi promised just such critical attention. For Said, Bennabi was 'the first to actively lay out a programme for the study of the

quandary of the Muslims on the basis of psychology, sociology, and the laws of history [ʿalā asās min ʿilm al-nafs wa al-ijtimāʿ wa sunnat al-tāʾrīkh]' [Said, 1993a: 69]. Like Bennabi, Said came to see the intellectual failings of contemporary Muslims as fundamental to all other challenges they face. He would continue to hold this view for decades to come:

The problem is neither colonialism nor its tools; the problem is within us. Once we solve the problem which lies amongst us then all [other] problems will be solved. It is not the triumph over colonialism which will solve our problems: indeed, [war-torn] Algeria has defeated colonialism but has not conquered itself by coming to common terms [kalimat al-sawāʾ; a reference to Quran 3:64] without killing. [Said, 2007c]

Said saw himself as taking up Bennabi's analysis not only of the ills of colonialism but also of that which made the colonised 'colonisable': that which engendered in them a 'receptivity to colonialism' [al-qābiliyyah li-l-istiʿmār; Said, 2002: 111]. Rather than focusing on international and intercultural oppression alone, moreover, he saw this approach as generally applicable to all forms of human subjugation – very much including those closer to home. The ultimate publication of madhhab ibn ādam would follow soon after the overthrow of nascent Syrian democracy at the hands of a Baʾathist coup d'état – for protesting against which Said earned the first of his many imprisonments. All of this had led him to the point where he would approvingly cite the father of civil disobedience Étienne de La Boétie's *Discourse On Voluntary Servitude* [Said, 2002: 110–118]. Both thinkers agree that if the consent of the servant is a necessary condition for their servitude, then that consent can and must be peacefully withdrawn.

RETURN TO THE SCRIPTURES: POWER AND DISSENT

The focus on intellectual and psychological preconditions for emancipatory social action (and the ambivalence towards the Muslim Brotherhood) which Said inherited from Malek Bennabi would colour his case for Islamically mandated nonviolence for the next fifty years. Significantly, it does so through Said's locating it within the Quranic text. 'Indeed the Quran points more often to the wickedness [ẓulm] which arises within oneself [yulaḥiquhu al-insān binafsihi] than to the wickedness which befalls them at the hands of others' [Said, 2002: 111], he observes. Among the verses which Said quotes most frequently are 41:53 [e.g. Said, 1993a: 38] and 13:11, the latter of which (repeated at Quran 8:53) inspired the title of one of Said's books first published in the early

1970s: *ḥatta yughayirū mā bi-anfusihim* [Said, 1998]. 'We will show them Our signs on the horizons [*fī al-āfāqi*] and in themselves [*fī anfusihim*] until it becomes clear to them that it is the truth' and '[w]e will not change the lot of a people until they change what is in their hearts [*mā bi-anfusihim*]'.

Searching for God's signs on the farthest horizons and within oneself is Said's overarching epistemological motto. This, for Said, constitutes God's instruction that one should follow a course like that laid out by Bennabi in embracing systematic critical introspection as a prerequisite for any form of social or cultural development. It is 'the key to entering into the world of the Quran' [Said, 2002: 110]. Personal transformation, religious belief, and political change are thereby inextricably linked – as we have repeatedly seen them linked by others in this monograph. The aforementioned book underlines this view through its subtitle: 'studies in the underlying laws governing personal and societal change' [*abḥāth fī sunan taghayyur al-nafs wa al-mujtamaʿ*]. It would, moreover, include a foreword by none other than Malek Bennabi himself, who evidently also regarded this religio-political fusion of personal and social as central to Said's writing. Previous movements for change in Islam [*al-ḥarakāt al-taghayyuriyyah*] have indeed taken Quranic 13:11 as emblematic, Bennabi writes. But unlike Said, he continues, they had not grasped that its call for change is not only spiritually transcendental [*ghaybī*] but sociological [*ijtimāʿī*; Bennabi in Said, 1998: 11].

Whereas some forms of Islamic pacifism discussed in this study take more otherworldly, ascetic, or quietist forms [esp. Chapters 3 and 5], Said's is self-consciously political. It calls for engagement rather than withdrawal; 'one might say that we have no more dangerous a foe than this obtuse intellectual apathy [*al-taballud al-fikrī*]' [Said, 1993a: 176]. Nothing could be further than the 'status quoism' of a Wahiduddin Khan [see Chapter 5] than Said's reply when asked the reason for his repeated imprisonments by the Syrian government: 'I am a dissident [*anā muʿāriḍ*]! I am an opponent of the powers that be!' [*muʿāriḍ lil-sulṭah al-mawjūdah*; Said, 2013]. His thought condemns quietism along with the resort to force and instead aspires to transform society. Closer to a populist Shariati [see Chapter 4] than a vanguardist Mawdūdī, he insists that this project cannot be top down. '[W]e have clung to [the search for] power [*quwwah*] and to the belief that the path to reform [*ṭarīq al-iṣlāḥ*] proceeds only from the power to rule [*ilā min al-ḥukm*] – when rule [*ḥukm*] is itself the product of the fruits of reform [*natāʾij al-iṣlāḥ*]' [Said, 1993a: 73]. It is political not only in terms of its call for change but also in the

ends at which such change is to be aimed and the means by which it is to be achieved. Echoing the words of Malek Bennabi in his foreword to Said's *ḥatta taghayyirū mā bi-anfusihim*, Said urges that the monotheism which lies at the heart of the Islamic faith must necessarily lead to political equality under the sovereignty of God:

> The idea of divine unity [*tawḥīd*] is not an issue for the heavens [*mushkilah samāwiyyah*] – it is an earthly and social challenge [*mushkilah arḍiyyah ijtimāʿiyyah*]. Its solution is come to common terms [*kalimat al-sawā'*]. This means that we should not take one another to be lords [of other people] – that none be obeyed [*lā yuṭāʿa*] other than God. [Said, 2007c]

Whereas, for instance, in Wahiduddin Khan [see Chapter 5] one sees *tawḥīd* as proof of the essentially rational and scientific nature of Islamic faith, an epistemological apologetics unconnected to any given historical circumstance, in Said it is something quite different. It is instead an emancipatory political principle which might more readily be compared to that advanced by Ali Shariati [see Chapter 4]. God, not worldly power, must always come first – and this fact has inescapable political ramifications. Though Said differs from them in profound respects, one may nonetheless compare him not only to other Muslim pacifists but also to more militant Islamists such as Abū al-Aʿlā al-Mawdūdī [d. 1979] and Sayyid Quṭb [d. 1966] – both of whom Said read and (rather selectively) quoted. Said's view that the political domination of human beings over one another usurps divine sovereignty [*ḥākimiyyah*] and denies the essential equality of all of God's creatures mirrors Mawdūdī at his most utopian and Quṭb at his most anarchistic. All reflect the fragmentation of authority and the reality of oppression to which the twentieth century bore witness. Said's awareness of this fragmentation is clear, as is his typically self-critical assessment of the scholarly class's complicity in it through what he sees as their irrationality and their willingness to serve the interests of tyrannical and undemocratic rulers. One recognises a sharp dividing line between Said and some of his contemporaries as he expresses just these views in a letter to the influential quietist Shaykh ʿAbdallāh bin Bayyah, firmly refusing the offer of a United Arab Emirates-sponsored peace prize in 2015:

> Indeed, thinkers and scholars are the source of this crisis, equally so through the books they have written, the sermons they have given, the ideas they have publicised – and through the [matters] on which they have remained silent. So I must apologise if I offend in saying that it is a grave act of fraud and counterfeit for Muslim scholars to gather in the midst of this ongoing calamity and count

themselves as saviours. It would be better for the scholars to attend [in the capacity of] those accused of a crime – for them to attend in order to repent, to undertake a radical reappraisal, to practice self-criticism, and to reconsider [their positions] . . . Too long have scholars and jurists forbidden things like riding in a car on the way to the *ḥajj* [pilgrimage], or the use of telephones. There remain some of them who forbid women from driving, and who deny even the fundamentals of modern science. All of this reveals how far removed they are from reality. It sometimes also reveals the state of complicity of such scholars and jurists, which leads them to remain silent [concerning] corruption and oppression. They accept the privileges which are presented to them, and when they are summoned by politicians they offer [only] what [those politicians] want to hear – and not what is [truly] incumbent upon them. [Said to Bin Bayyah, see Appendix]

As well as such scathing criticism, the letter also contains a more subtle piece of intertextual chastisement. Said pointedly quotes the Gospel of Matthew [6:23]: 'if the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness' [see Appendix]. This verse is less celebrated than that which immediately follows it, and which Said clearly implies as a rebuke of his generously funded correspondent. Easily one of the most often-quoted Biblical verses, it famously concludes: 'ye cannot serve God and Mammon' [Matthew 6:24]. The peace prize was to be jointly awarded to Jawdat Said and to Wahiduddin Khan. As we have seen [Chapter 5], the latter accepted it alone.

Said is not unique in his dissident political orientation – indeed almost all of our subjects can be so described. Nor, however, is he automatically opposed to the powers that be in a reactionary or contrarian sense. Even on the most global scale, his views are not without nuance. Certainly, Said is scathing in his condemnation of the United Nations, for instance – or more specifically of the 'undemocratic' tyranny and 'violation of human rights' embodied in the veto power enjoyed by members of the United Nations Security Council [e.g. Said 2013; Said, 2002: 114–115; see also Appendix]. Nonetheless, he at the same time holds other liberal supranational institutions in high regard. He often expresses admiration for the European Union, sharing the view of many Europeans that it represents the most successful effort in peace-building the world has yet seen. 'The unification of Europe is a lesson, oh Arabs! History can be cut short [*yumkin ikhtizāl al-ta'rīkh*]. Europe has united without anyone losing anything while everyone gains – and we too can do this' [Said, 2007b; see also Appendix]. He praises liberal democracy, even as he opposes the policies and structures of some liberal democratic bodies.

While a Western reader might perhaps feel these positions to be in some tension with one another, they are less likely to be ambivalent about some of Said's other geopolitical judgements. Westerners, and perhaps

particularly Americans, who find much to admire in Said's principled calls for nonviolent education and liberation may be surprised to find him taking a decidedly optimistic view of events they themselves have only seen portrayed as catastrophic. Said writes from a different perspective: not only in terms of religion and culture but also in terms of the political environment of Ba'athist Syria. The regional alignment of that country, even notwithstanding the fact that it is home to many Shi'ites and shrines as venerated as that of Sayyida Zaynab (daughter of Imām ʿAlī and the Prophet's only surviving child Fāṭimah; the shrine near which Ali Shariati is interred [Chapter 4]) – has long been towards the Islamic Republic of Iran. Said, like many Syrians of his generation, saw much to be admired in that new religio-political departure. The form which his admiration took, moreover, tells us more about the nature and origins of his understanding of pacifism and nonviolence in Islam.

Said's reaction to the 1978–1979 Iranian Revolution is remarkable for a number of reasons. It certainly stands out for the degree to which he saw the Revolution as a model of nonviolent resistance [e.g. Said, 2007b] – though the same assessment has also been made by secular scholars of political science [e.g. Chenoweth and Stephan, 2011: 116]. Needless to say, this is an impression which resonates more strongly with the idealistic aspirations of Ali Shariati [Chapter 4] than it does with the Revolution's generally horrified reception in the West. Certainly, many of the millions of demonstrators who overturned the autocratic US-backed monarchy did embrace nonviolence as both tactic and ideal – though it is not the aim of this study to ascertain their number or proportion. It is not the factual history of modern Iran which concerns us here, so much as what Said's impression of it might tell us about him.

Beyond its revolutionary optimism, Said's reaction to the Revolution is notable for its Islamocentrism. Not only are references to non-Muslim advocates of nonviolence generally absent from Said's writing, but even when as venerated a figure as Mahatma Gandhi is unwontedly mentioned,[1] it is to compare him unfavourably with the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini:

[T]hus [Khomeini's] resistance was knowledge-based [ʿilmiyyah], peaceful [silmiyyah], and nonviolent [lāʿunfiyyah]. If nothing else he adhered to this until he succeeded in it, committed not to resort to violence. This was the first time in history in which a person other than a prophet succeeded without force in leading

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[1] Among writers on Said, Abdessamad Belhaj does detect 'the influence of Gandhi' [Belhaj, 2017: 231] upon him, but unfortunately does not detail how or where this is to be found. If such influence is indeed present it is likely subliminal or indirect.

and transforming a people from the worship of man to the worship of God – truly an unprecedented historical development. Even Gandhi did not manage in his own nonviolent appeal [*daʿwatihi al-lāʿunfiyyah*] to reach the same level of success as Khomeini achieved. This is because while Gandhi was leading India in nonviolent opposition [to the British Empire] he was unable to control his comrades, some of whom could not control themselves and did resort to violence … How can a community [*ummah*] be forged without force and without blood? This is what the prophets brought and which Khomeini revived. This is true power. It is the power of non-compulsion [*al-lāikrāhah*], the force which triumphs over a person's conscience rather than over their body … It is true that the soldiers [*jund*] of the Shah killed demonstrators, but the demonstrators did not kill even one of the soldiers of the Shah. [Said 2009b]

It is perhaps unsurprising that one of the few contemporary Western intellectuals one finds repeatedly cited in Said's later writings took a similarly Panglossian view of the Revolution. In the face of opposition from his peers – not least the great Orientalist Maxime Rodinson and trailblazing feminist Simone de Beauvoir – Michel Foucault famously extolled the virtues of the revolt against a despotic Shah as the dawn of a new era of resistance to power through '*spiritualité politique*' ['political spirituality'; Foucault, 1978; see also Afary and Anderson, 2005]. A political spirituality is very much what concerns Said, and his later interest in Foucault stems as much from this as his ambivalent sympathy for the *rūḥāniyyah ijtimāʿiyyah* [social or societal spirituality] advocated by Hassan al-Banna and his confederates in the Muslim Brotherhood. Said's growing distaste for the exercise of coercive power and the damaging limits it places on the human imagination will have endeared Foucault's ideas to him still further. As we will see, Said shares much of the later Foucault's concern with unmediated human freedom in the face of ubiquitous political (and particularly state) power. He would agree that 'bringing into question of power relations and the "agonism" between power relations and the intransitivity of freedom is a permanent political task inherent in all social existence' [Foucault, 1982: 223].

It is then no coincidence that one eventually also finds Said citing that other celebrated product of the Sorbonne, Muhammad Arkoun. Here one finds a concrete example of a Muslim intellectual grappling with the distorting and foreclosing effects of political power in limiting the Muslim imagination. It is a struggle which Said sees as parallel to his own quest to recover the pacifist message of Islam rendered 'unthought' (in Arkoun's terms) by the operation of power [e.g. Said, 1993a: 32]. It is this which must be recovered and returned to its rightful place, he reminds us in another rare quotation from Christian scripture: 'What we have for

so long underestimated [*istakhfafnā*] will become [our] deliverance [*al-khalāṣ*], and Jesus, peace be upon him, says in the Bible that the stone that the builders refused will become the cornerstone' [Said, 2007a; Mark 12:10–11, echoing Psalm 118:22–23].

The development of Said's ideas can and should be described through its relationships with other writers – from early readings of Iqbal and Bennabi to parallels with Mawdūdī and Quṭb to later encounters with the likes of Foucault and Arkoun. Yet in terms of its rhetorical presentation, and in terms of its essential character as a reflection of Said's personal faith, its foundations are to be sought in the scripture and sacred history of Islamic tradition. It is Said's understanding of the Quran, the lives of the prophets, and the experiences of the Prophet Muḥammad and his Companions which will most occupy our attention here. It is these whence Said draws his exemplars, his characteristic language, and – as a believing Muslim – his ultimate proof-texts.

At the heart of Said's reading of the Quran and the sacred history of early Islam is the conviction that the true message of the faith has become hidden and distorted by history. In this respect, at least, one might find justification in identifying him with the general trend of Salafism (itself a polysemic and often problematic label [see for e.g. Lauzière, 2010; Griffel, 2015]). He shares with 'Salafism' the view that historical Islam represents the 'mixing together of the sacred and the squalid [*inkhilāṭ al-danis wa al-muqaddas*]' [Said, 1993a: 56], and that one's goal must be the purifying separation of the former from the latter. Concomitantly, he shares the characteristically Salafist combination of veneration of the very earliest Muslims (the eponymous *salaf al-ṣāliḥ* or righteous ancestors) and scathing criticism of subsequent generations. His quarrel begins, indeed, with the ascent of the first Umayyad Caliph Muʿāwiyyah [d. 680], who 'seized the power to rule by force and used overwhelming compulsion [*qahr*] to turn it into a [dynastic] inheritance' [Said, 1993a: 30]. The historical caliphate subsequent to ʿAlī bin Abī Ṭālib was thus for Said not a true caliphate but rather an 'Arab tribal state' [Said, 2009c] which abandoned the highest ideals of Islam; only the Rāshidūn were true Caliphs. 'It is noteworthy that Jawdat Said's ideas have received attention in Islamist circles, and some of his views are evident in the writings of moderate Islamists such as the late Umar al-Tilmisani, the third supreme guide of the Muslim Brotherhood' [Halverston, 2012: 77]. Indeed, the Syrian branch of the Brotherhood publicly mourned his passing [Walid, 2022].

Where Said differs from so many of his reforming contemporaries, however, is in the nature of his call for a rethinking of mainstream

understandings of God's will, His prophets, and their companions with respect to a single crucial moral issue. His argument is not that we have been too lax in our observance, nor insufficiently fastidious in condemning those others whom we see as failing [*al-walā' wa al-barā'*] – as so many Salafists insist. Quite the contrary: one of his main charges is that Muslim sectarianism reproduces the mistakes of the puritanically schismatic Kharijites of the seventh and eighth centuries. Rather, the issue as Said sees it is that we have simply – and tragically – drawn the wrong lessons from scripture and the example of the prophets. The result of this misreading is confusion and the impossibility of finding real solutions to the challenges of the day. He repeats that 'the crisis does not lie in the nature of the problems themselves, but rather in the method by which they are analysed' [*al-azmah laysat fī ṭabīʿat al-mushkilāt wa innamā fī kayfiyyat tafsīrihā*; Said, 1993a: 74; cf. Said 2002: 113]. To summarise his voluminous critique in the briefest possible terms: Said charges that historical Muslims have confused strength with weakness and weakness with strength. His call is thus nothing less than a wholesale inversion of the mainstream Muslim moral and political imagination.

THE ABSOLUTE MORAL OBLIGATION OF WITNESS

Jawdat Said reiterates Malek Bennabi's charge that Muslims have fixated on the power of physical force when their real strength lies in their ideas and their culture. He then applies it to the learning he received at his madrasah and at al-Azhar. While one prophetic example stands out, Said does not limit himself to it. The Quranic account of Cain and Abel [*hābīl wa qābīl*] is certainly emblematic of Said's pacifist understanding of Islam, having become something of a trademark after appearing in the titles of several of his publications. But it is not exhaustive of it. Rather, one finds clear expressions of Said's perspective not only when discussing the earliest human beings (the first sons of Adam and Eve in the Abrahamic narrative) but also in his understanding of exemplary figures right through to the end of the prophetic age. An indicative example comes through his discussion of Bilāl bin Rabāḥ [d. 640], a manumitted slave of African extraction and one of the earliest converts to Islam – famous not only for his superb voice as the 'first muezzin' but also for his stoical refusal to recant his monotheism in the face of physical torture.

I wish to put an end to the falsification [*tazyīf*] which has befallen the story of Bilāl, and the story of the family of Yāsir, and the story of Muḥammad, and the story of

every one of the prophets who God has told us said: 'We shall certainly bear with patience [*naṣbiranna*; we will exercise *ṣabr*] all the hurt you may cause us' [Qur'ān 14:12] … I wish to point out and puncture the traditional Muslim interpretation [*tafsīr al-muslimīn al-taqlīdī*] of Bilāl's situation – that is, that it was the product of the weakness of the Muslims and their lack of power … We [the Muslims] understood Bilāl's inner strength [*quwwat bilāl al-dākhiliyyah*] as impotence while [in fact] Bilāl bin Rabāḥ set the highest standard in his own freedom for all free people of the world to the end of time. Bilāl exercised freedom of thought [*ḥurriyyah fikriyyah*] without asking the Quraish to bestow it upon him … Bilāl showed us what freedom is, that freedom is not bestowed but practiced – with the person bearing all the consequences of his nonviolent resistance [*ʿiṣyānihi al-lā ʿunfī*]. [Said, 2009a]

In this brief discussion, one finds encapsulated a gamut of Said's most recurrent ideas. Said identifies – through the very words of scripture – a pacifist ethic running through the lives of the prophets and their closest companions. Crucially, he does so while elevating mental and spiritual agency over physical dominance of the body. While Said never advocates some gnostic dualism of exalted souls trapped in fallen matter, he argues consistently that freedom of conscience is the highest and most necessary freedom. Finally, he presents all of this in the context of a critique of the mainstreams of Muslim society which have failed to draw these conclusions but have instead inverted their true meaning.

This qualitative preference for freedom of conscience over material concerns is one which Said identifies in the life of the Prophet Muḥammad. Like some others discussed in this study (not least Bawa Muhaiyaddeen [Chapter 3]) and some who fall outside of it (such as Mahmoud Mohammad Ṭaha), he identifies it most clearly in the earlier Meccan years of the Prophet's life. It is here that one sees the Prophet and his Companions not only practising the virtue of forbearance [*ṣabr*] but also persisting in their teaching and their witness even in the face of seemingly overwhelming odds. It is here that one sees, according to Said, that nonviolent activism is not only a tactic to be rationally adopted for strategic ends but rather that it is also an absolute moral obligation. It is a duty, moreover, which is ultimately borne by the individual and manifested in the individual – not one which is imposed, granted, or warranted by any outside worldly force:

If the Messenger of God [Muḥammad] had asked the Quraysh [who oppressed him] for freedom of speech and preaching, they would not have granted it. Instead, he exercised the duty to preach [*wājib al-daʿwah*], not the freedom to preach [*ḥurriyyat al-daʿwah*], since the correct path is that of performing duties, not that of claiming rights. [Said, 1993a: 46–47]

The moral obligation to pursue nonviolent action is understood by Said as absolute not only in the sense that all people at all times are beholden to it but also in that it is not contingent upon any other state of affairs. This position is liberating, in that it allows the believer to preach, practice, and fulfil their duty to God under any and all circumstances. It allows one, to paraphrase a famous line of verse by Said's contemporary Sayyid Quṭb, to be 'free behind bars' [*ḥurrun warā' al-sudūd*]. Said, who was repeatedly imprisoned on account of his preaching 'in opposition to the powers that be' [Said 2013], is under no illusions that nonviolence will not be met with force. On the contrary, he explicitly recognises that it is likely to elicit just such a violent response – in terms as realistic as Shariati's engagement with martyrdom [Chapter 4] is mystical:

[T]here is nothing which prevents the Muslim from being afflicted and imprisoned as he attempts to extricate Islam from the prison of suppression and [scriptural] distortion [*sijn al-kitmān wa al-taḥrīf*][2] ... Indeed the proclaiming of Islam [*bayān al-islām*] does not require one to bide one's time until one is strong [*intiẓār al-quwwah*], nor to wait for propitious circumstances. It is such very notions which stand in the way of the call to God and the reform of society which Islam must comprise. [*yaqūm bihi al-islām*; Said, 1993a: 92]

Said's recognition of the potential dangers of nonviolent activism is not incidental but essential to his perspective. Said identifies his signature scriptural inspiration through the saying of the Prophet Muḥammad that in times of strife [*fitnah*] one should 'break one's bows, cut their strings, remain in the depths of one's home, and be like Adam's son' [Tirmidhī 2204]. The son of Adam in question is Abel [*hābīl*], and the Prophet's injunction to imitate him is found repeated again and again throughout the titles and texts of Said's writing on pacifism and nonviolence in Islam. Indeed, it would furnish Said with his most recognisable rhetoric.

CAIN AND ABEL AS MORAL EXEMPLARS

The Islamic account of the story of Cain and Abel [*hābīl wa qābīl*], the first sons of Adam and Eve [*ādam wa ḥawā'*; of these four names, only *ādam* is

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[2] It is notable that the word '*taḥrīf*' used here is the Quranic term for the alleged distortion of previous revelations brought about by Jews and Christians which led to their divergence from the eternal Islamic model – either by tampering with the text of their revealed scripture or by subverting its spirit through wilful misinterpretation. The implication is that Muslims' failure to recognise the 'inner strength' of the prophets' refusal to use force is tantamount to a deviation from the truth of Islam.

strictly Quranic], closely parallels that found in the fourth book of Genesis. Whereas elsewhere in this study we see the Iranian philosopher Ali Shariati developing a sociological dimension of his own case for Islamic nonviolence on elements of the story which the Abrahamic faiths share [Chapter 4], Said is particularly concerned with a specifically Islamic element. Whereas Shariati uses the scriptural narrative as the basis for an exercise akin to historical materialism, moreover, Said does not. Though Said has been accused of materialism [al-Tall, 1995: 85–100] – a charge he rejects [Said, 2013] – he reads its protagonists not as reflections on agrarianism or pastoralism but as pure moral exemplars. The words of Abel form the heart of this reading. Whereas the Genesis account gives a longer account of the fratricidal farmer Cain's prevarications, in the Quran it is indeed his murdered pastoralist Abel whose words are highlighted:

Recite to them the truth of the story of the two sons of Adam. Behold! they each presented a sacrifice (to Allah): it was accepted from one but not from the other. Said the latter: 'Be sure I will slay thee.' 'Surely' said the former 'Allah doth accept of the sacrifice of those who are righteous. If thou dost stretch thy hand against me to slay me it is not for me to stretch my hand against thee to slay thee: for I do fear Allah the Cherisher of the worlds. For me I intend to let thee draw on thyself my sin as well as thine for thou wilt be among the companions of the fire and that is the reward of those who do wrong.' The (selfish) soul of the other led him to the murder of his brother: he murdered him and became (himself) one of the lost ones. Then Allah sent a raven who scratched the ground to show him how to hide the shame of his brother. 'Woe is me!' said he: 'Was I not even able to be as this raven and to hide the shame of my brother?' Then he became full of regrets. [Quran 5:27–31, Yusuf Ali version]

Jawdat Said takes the words of Abel as he faced death at the hands of his brother Cain as the *locus classicus* of the Islamic virtue of nonviolence. It is testament, he writes, to 'the human ability to sacrifice oneself in order to guide others to the right path [*fī sabīl hidāyat al-ākhirīn*]' [Said, 1993a: 77]. It is vital to Said's understanding of the tale that Abel's refusal to fight, and his final witness to the truth of God, resulted in his death. Like the aforementioned torture of Bilāl, it demonstrates the extreme lengths to which the believer must be prepared to go in his nonviolent witness. Furthermore, it does so in a manner sure to baffle those who mistake physical coercion for the highest form of strength: the charge against his contemporaries which Said inherits from Malek Bennabi. The result not only exposes the extent of their error but also its depth. It portrays them as walking a path directly opposite that trodden by God's prophets:

The whole world recognises the right of self-defense when attacked – all except for the prophets, whom some people regard as foolish or mad [*majānīn*]. Because the

prophets are the only ones who say with an extraordinary unanimity: 'We shall certainly bear with patience all the hurt you may cause us' [Quran 14:12]. It is for this very reason that people call the prophets mad. [Said, 2007a]

The cause of this error is not only infatuation with violent force, moreover, but a lack of faith – faith in oneself, faith in ideas, and faith in the persuasive power of the message of Islam:

[T]he Muslims have become afflicted by that which afflicted non-Muslims [*ghayr-ihim*]: a lack of confidence [*ʿadam al-thiqah*] which led the people to fear that preaching avails them nothing, [thereby] descending from that best part of *jihād* [*afḍal al-jihād*], that part which brings the greatest of benefit [*afḍal al-kasab*], down to the lowest of levels [*adnā al-darajāt*] as they denigrate the importance of speaking the truth. [Said, 1993a: 159]

The 'lowest of levels' to which Said refers here indicates violent struggle [*jihād*], and in so doing illustrates a quandary which he, like other advocates for Islamic pacifism and nonviolence, must face. While Said finds a great deal of scriptural support for the avoidance of harm and violence, his commitments both to the inerrancy of the Quran and the impeccability of the Prophetic example also challenges him with instances where force seems permitted or even recommended. Even the Quranic story of Cain and Abel, which we have seen Said identify as the mainspring of nonviolent ethics in Islam, is immediately followed by a verse which is less unequivocally pacific:

We ordained for the Children of Israel that if anyone slew a person *unless it be for murder or for spreading mischief in the land* it would be as if he slew the whole people: and if anyone saved a life it would be as if he saved the life of the whole people. [Quran 5:32, Yusuf Ali version, emphasis added]

Said finds a great deal of evidence of nonviolence in the Prophetic biography's Meccan period – a principle which 'the Prophet compelled his followers to observe, forbidding them even the right to self-defence' [1993a: 233]. Yet he must by the same token recognise the Prophet's application of force both within the Medinan state he ruled and against its Meccan opponents. Said's discomfort is palpable when challenged by an interviewer over the need to exercise violence in defence of law and order [*iqāmat al-qawanīn*]. He replies quoting scripture that one should requite wickedness with virtue [Quran 41:34–35; Said, 2013; the same response given by Rabia Harris in Chapter 7]. Said's way out of this impasse is more nuanced than this alone, however.

The more straightforward of his arguments is a practical one against warfare: it is simply no longer appropriate for human life on earth [Said, 1993a: 61]. Yet his main case is more complex. Said argues that only God

can sanction violence and agrees with Wahiduddin Khan [Chapter 5] that the only violence which God has sanctioned is that in defence of freedom of conscience. Even then Said echoes Shariati [Chapter 4] in declaring that 'he who carries within himself the passion for martyrdom [*al-shawq ilā al-istishhād*] will achieve true victory, more so than he who desires to kill the enemy and survive himself' [Said, 1993a: 178ff.]:

Just as the practice of human sacrifice was nullified at the hands of Abraham, the Koran clipped the wings of war when it restricted it to the protection of freedom of conscience alone and when it declared 'No compulsion in religion!' [Quran 2:256], heralding the era of peace. [Said, 1993a: 62]

We have already seen Said use 'non-compulsion' [*lā-ikrāhiyyah*] as synonymous with nonviolence [*lā-ʿunf*] (as indeed several activists interviewed later in this study have done [see Chapter 7 and Harris, 1998: 111]) in his earlier discussion of the Iranian Revolution. One cannot justify violence against beliefs which differ from our own on the mere basis of that clash, he insists. To judge others' beliefs as warranting violence against *them* by the same token justifies their violence against oneself, he argues [Said, 1993a: 58–59; compare also Chapter 7]. Such intolerance in Said's view typifies not the struggles of the Prophet but rather the militancy of the radical Khārijites who anathematised and fought against their fellow Muslims in the early decades of Islam. It marks the difference between struggle and secessionism: what he calls *al-jihād wa al-khurūj* [Said, 1993a: 233–235]. To underscore his point, Said quotes no less an authority than the medieval Hanbalite scholar Ibn Taymiyyah: 'Killing in Islam does not have the aim of eliminating disbelief [*kufr*], but of eliminating injustice [*ẓulm*]', Said recounts, before adding himself that 'the greatest injustice is to oppress an opinion and to practice coercion in religion' [Said, 1993a: 47]. This was the one and only reason for which the Prophet fought, Said urges: to make manifest the Quranic principle that there should be no compulsion in religion. And this he achieved. Said thus reverses a mainstream understanding of scriptural abrogation [*naskh*], whereby the eventual permission to fight abrogated the earlier forbidding of violence. The whole sacred history of Islam, centred on the life of the Prophet, in effect abrogated this abrogation and returned us to the initial and more fundamental ethic of nonviolence.

The obligation to struggle on the path of God remains, Said insists, even when only its more elevated aspects are historically appropriate:

Let the Muslim be reassured that *jihād* is indeed effective [*māḍin*] and will remain so until the Hour [i.e. the end of time]. But it is so [only] for that community which has made itself independent and distinguished itself by its manifest faith [*bi-imānihi*

al-wāḍiḥ] and its firm belief [ʿaqīdatihi al-ṣulbah]. The means by which the Islamic community can make itself [truly] independent is not by killing [qitāl] and the exercise of strength [istiʿmāl al-quwwah]. Rather, it is by preaching [al-daʿwah] and persuasion [al-iqnāʿ] – just as it was for all the prophets. [Said, 1993a: 159]

In this, we see not only a call for the re-establishment of preaching God's message as central to a believing Muslim's mission but also a reiteration of the preference for self-criticism which once drew Said to the work of Malek Bennabi. Believers should 'govern themselves according to God's command [bi-amr allāh] before they [seek to] govern others' [Said, 1993a: 159], he writes. This necessary task of moral self-improvement, and by means of it the improvement of others and of society at large, first takes place for him within communities rather than between them. 'The work of the judge is not that of the preacher' [Said, 1993a: 128], Said insists – and it has even been suggested [Belhaj, 2017: 237] that this stance directly influenced Muslim Brotherhood leader Hassan al-Hudaybi's attack on Quṭbist militancy in his near eponymous duʿāh wa lā quḍāh (Preachers, Not Judges) [see also Zollner, 2007 and 2009].

Comparisons might be drawn between the primacy accorded to preaching as the main tool of nonviolent activism by Jawdat Said and by Wahiduddin Khan [see Chapter 5]. Yet significant distinctions can also be drawn with respect both to their respective justifications for this practice and to the manner in which they communicate it. Whereas we see Wahiduddin Khan make direct appeals to early modern history (particularly that of Mughal South Asia under an accommodatingly ecumenical Akbar the Great) as evidence of the greater practical efficacy of nonviolent activism over forceful coercion (particularly that of a chauvinistic emperor Aurangzeb), Said's writing contains few such discussions. Indeed, as we have seen, Said tends rather to portray the political history of Muslim communities after the seventh century as fundamentally misguided [see also Appendix].

This is not merely a matter of rhetorical framing. It reflects also the fact that for Said, the call to nonviolence is a moral obligation which is not contingent on historical circumstances. The transcendent aspect of sacred history suits it better than the vagaries of more temporal happenstance. Not only is strategic nonviolence of the sort which one sometimes reads Khan as advocating distinct from Said's position, it is one which we have seen him explicitly condemn as a major barrier to social reform [Said, 1993a: 92]. As a result, one finds Said making the following admission, in which he both accepts the limitation of his writing and declares its value to be independent of its tactical usefulness in convincing the unconvinced:

This has been written but has not yet fully come to fruition – this is why it has not come out perfectly coordinated [*mutanāsiqan muktāmilan*]. The intention is to register the idea, to express a view … There is more to such announcement than [merely] to convince [another]. I do not write on this subject in order to convince those who dissent from this approach to Islamic action [*ṭarīqat lil-ʿamal al-islāmī*]. Rather, the concern [*ḥirṣnā*] which drives us to express this view is that people might know that we do take this path and this view of Islamic action. [Said, 1993a: 85]

Likewise, one might be tempted to draw superficial parallels between Khan's and Said's appeals not to the content of history but to its overall shape and direction. Both writers appear often to appeal to historical teleology in the view that nonviolence is ultimately in accord with the inevitable path of human history. Certainly, Said does urge that 'we must understand the directions in which the winds of history [*rīāḥ al-tā'rīkh*] are blowing' [Said, 2002: 111]. Whereas we have seen the teleological element of Khan's thought to be unequivocally explicit, in Said's case it is much more ambiguous. The very fact that Said's account of historical Muslim experience is so much more critical than that of Khan is pertinent to this. Whereas Khan's Whiggish historiography presents a continuous, if not entirely unchallenged, progress of nonviolent Islamic action from century to century, one finds no such trajectory in Said's writing. It is true that both men agree that the present day offers particularly fertile ground in which nonviolent interpretations of the faith may grow. But in Said's view such a development is not a continuation of an inevitable progression but a reversal of the past 1,500 years' errors. Indeed, we have already seen him praise the European Union's peace-building not as an example of progress in history but rather the overcoming of history [Said, 2007b].

One might similarly draw hasty parallels between the teleological elements in the writing of Said and in that of Ali Shariati. Even notwithstanding Shariati's critiques of Marxism, it is clear from discussions elsewhere in this study that a strong case can be made that Shariati's concern for the role of the means of production in the psychology of violence implies a broadly Marxian historical materialism. We have seen him interpret the Quranic Cain and Abel as an object lesson in material historical dialectic. One does not find such discussions in Said's work – and certainly not in their shared scriptural touchstone of Cain and Abel. There as elsewhere, Said's argument is fundamentally a moral rather than a material one.

A semantic point illustrates this fact. It is important to recognise that Said's frequent appeals to the 'laws of history' (including those quoted

earlier) consistently opt for the Quranic term *sunan* in preference to the more conventional modern Arabic *qawanīn*. This is a lexical distinction which Said makes consistently throughout his work. *Sunan* [plural of *sunnah*] literally means 'habitual practices' and is most often associated with the custom [*sunnah*] of the Prophet Muḥammad and hence also of *Sunnī* Islam, which sees itself as observing it. Relatedly, the Quran speaks repeatedly of 'God's custom' [*sunnat allāh*; Quran 17:77, 33:38, 33:62, 35:43, 40:85, 48:23] when describing His moral judgement of human actions. These are the associations which Said expects the reader automatically to make. No modern Arabic text discussing physical laws or legal prescriptions would use this redolent term in preference to the standard *qānūn* [pl. *qawānīn*]. It is unfortunate that the English translation of 'law' for all of these terms elides this distinction, and with it Said's implication that the 'laws' in question are always and ultimately subject to divine will. In other words, Said's ostensible materialism is in fact closer to medieval Ashʿarite metaphysics than to secular ontological materialism or physicalism. The flow of historical events is occasionalistic rather than deterministic, decided not by impersonal causality but by the guidance and judgement of a personal God. It comprises the signs [*āyāt*] God sends to us upon the horizons, as Said never tires of insisting. Said's lauding of the human 'nervous system which is capable of uncovering laws [*sunan*] and making profitable use of them [*taskhīrihā*]' [Said, 2002: 110], for all its ostentatiously biological ornament, is therefore at its heart a piously moralising one. The causal processes to which he appeals are divinely ordained moral absolutes rather than the contingent findings of empirical sciences in which he had no training and little knowledge. They are a matter, in Aristotelian terms, not of material, formal, or efficient causes – but of final causes. This, in turn, makes sense of his ambiguous relationship with teleology. The ends [*teloi*] he envisages represent the realm of moral absolutes rather than the inescapable conclusion of an historical trajectory. They are ends, that is, which one might reach at any point in time – or not reach at all. Contrary to the suggestions of critical scholars and polemicists [e.g. al-Tall, 1995; Belhaj, 2017], Said's is no more a materialist historicism than the Reverend Martin Luther King's celebrated remark that 'the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice' is a discourse on formal geometry.

A related semantic issue arises in relation both to another critics' charge against Said and with it another potential convergence with Wahiduddin Khan. In this instance, it arises from the polysemy of the

Arabic term *'ilm* – variously translatable as knowledge, learning, lore, intellection, or science. *'Ilm* is something which Said never ceases in praising; 'knowledge [*'ilm*] is that which raises up all measures, while ignorance [*jahl*] is the source of all evils' [Said, 1993a: 60]. Indeed, he presents it not only as the ultimate solution to the problems faced by the contemporary Arab world but the key to peace itself: 'peace is the child of learning [*'ilm*]' [Said, 1993b: 15]. It is of no small importance, then, that one understand what Said himself may or may not intend by that expansive term. The analysis of Abdessamad Belhaj, for instance, in proceeding from the problematic view that Said's is 'one of the most rationalist, materialist, and historicist views in Islamic reformism' [Belhaj, 2017: 232], naturally reads *'ilm* as referring to natural science – as indeed in the right context it does. This is moreover a reading encouraged by Said's peppering of his writing with references such as that to 'the musculature and the nervous system' mentioned earlier [Said, 2002: 110]. The fact that these borrowings from the scientific lexicon are so trivial and so opportunistic, and that Said's scientific training is so obviously lacking, leads Belhaj to see this as evidence of 'naivety and scientism' [Belhaj, 2017: 232]. It is an unfortunate irony that the passage which Belhaj quotes to illustrate Said's rationalistic elevation of human over divine knowledge is centred on what is in fact a Quranic quotation. Neither Said nor Belhaj point this out, it should be noted. Rather, Said simply expects his Muslim readership to recognise the reference (not least by its notoriety and by its strikingly Quranic expression *walīun ḥamīmun*, starkly distinct from the more modern and conversational style of Said's own prose).[3]

Scientism of a sort certainly does play some role in Said's writing, all of this being said. Rather than evincing a thoroughgoing philosophical commitment, however, this seems more broadly to reflect the hegemonic power of appeals to 'experts in lab-coats' throughout modern culture in general and Said's home in the secular socialist Ba'athist Syrian Arab Republic in particular. One finds no equal in the work of Said of Wahiduddin Khan's more consequential scientism [see Chapter 5]. Said does not reify 'Science', but instead quotes the scriptural 'God creates what ye know not' [Quran 8:16] to the effect that learning is an ongoing and unfolding process 'which has not concluded' [Said, 1993a: 23].

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[3] '[R]epel (Evil) with what is better: Then will he between whom and thee was hatred become as it were thy friend and intimate [*walīun ḥamīmun*]! And no one will be granted such goodness except those who exercise patience and self-restraint' [Quran 41:34–35, Yusuf Ali version].

Unlike some contemporary preachers, or indeed earlier modernist reformers, Said does not concern himself with spurious apologetic attempts at presenting his ideas as buttressed by nuclear physics, or astrophysics, or evolutionary biology. His work contains neither the pseudo-science of a Khan, nor even the geometric argumentation of his contemporary Syrian reformist Muhammad Shahrour [d. 2019], whose doctorate was after all in civil engineering. Neither does one find much in the way of concern with the moral value of the non-human universe, no 'cosmopiety' [Pettman, 2010] or sacralisation of nature and animals comparable to that of Bawa Muhaiyaddeen [see Chapter 3]. Said was indeed at times a farmer, and latterly expresses concern over climate change [see Appendix], but he was neither an ecologist nor a vegetarian.

On the contrary, Said's concern is rather one which he inherits from Malek Bennabi: his interest is less in the natural sciences than in the human and social sciences. While Said never countenances the idea that truths could be incommensurable or inherently conflicting, his main appeals are to the modern disciplines of *psychology* [ʿilm al-nafs] and *sociology* [ʿilm al-ijtimāʿ] and to their role in reforming *Islamic learning* [ʿilm]. Each of these disciplines is in Arabic perfectly conventionally referred to as ʿilm (hence also ʿālim being comprehensible as 'physical scientist', 'expert', or 'Islamic scholar', depending on the context. We have certainly seen Said use it in the lattermost sense during the scathing rebuke to ʿAbdullāh Bin Bayyah quoted earlier [see also Appendix]). It may be true that one finds no equal in his writing to a Frantz Fanon in terms of a psychological analysis of political oppression, nor of a Fatema Mernissi in terms of a sociological critique of historical tradition. Nevertheless, the 'sciences of the self and of society' [Said, 1993a: 69] are intimately connected to his call for Islamic nonviolence. This is again because he understands nonviolence as beginning within the soul and psyche of man and expressing itself throughout his common life in a community of others.

While Said regards the ultimate effects of nonviolent actions as sociological in their scope, in other words, he sees the origin and impetus behind them as internal to the individual. They rely, in the words of Foucault quoted earlier, upon the fundamental 'intransitivity of freedom' [Foucault, 1982: 223]. Like La Boétie, whom we have also seen Said cite, he regards acquiescence to the tyranny of violence as its necessary precondition, and refusal to accept it as indispensable to any hope for peace. Here a final point of distinction between Said and his peers is apposite: that of the guiding role of the social and human sciences. It is by their

means that he reaches his conclusions – in contradistinction to the Sufi mysticism which we see in the experience of several other Muslim pacifists [see especially Chapters 1, 3, and 5]. Indeed, on the very rare occasions where Said mentions Sufism [*taṣawwuf*] at all, it is frequently in the modern and often pejorative sense of 'mysticism'. In fact, he goes so far as to list 'mystical tendencies' [*naza'āt al-taṣawwuf*] alongside 'the Tartar invasion and the sack [*tadmīr*] of Baghdad' by the Mongols as among the greatest historical catastrophes [*al-nakbāt*] suffered by Islamic civilisation [Said, 1993a: 24]. Here he is closer to the likes of Muḥammad ʿAbduh and his even more ardently anti-Sufi student Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍāʾ than to the likes of Bawa Muhaiyaddeen who ground their call for nonviolence on explicitly Sufi mystical language and practices.[4] Said's recurrent touchstones are *ʿilm*, *rushd* and *al-rāshid* [*learning*, *mature reason*, and the *reasonable man*] rather than *maʿrifah* and *al-ʿārif* [*immediate knowledge* and its mystically enlightened *knower*]. Said's inspiration, once again, draws more upon a combination of the progressive aspirations of *nahḍah*-era intellectuals such as ʿAbduh and Iqbal and the psychological autocritique of Malek Bennabi. Said himself, of course, would aver that his ultimate inspiration comes from the Quran itself, and with it 'God's signs upon the horizons and in oneself'.

Irrespective of the details of its provenance, and notwithstanding the degree to which the reader may find it attractive, Jawdat Said's approach to Islam constitutes a sustained effort in the theory of nonviolent action. His own persistence in this project, for all the adverse effects it had on his prospects and on his freedom from incarceration, match this theory with committed practical application. As both theory and praxis, moreover, Jawdat Said's Islamic nonviolence continues to have its adherents. This not least during the early phases of the ill-fated Arab Spring in Syria and among the diaspora of civil society activists in exile which has resulted from it – some of whom are interviewed elsewhere in the present study [see Chapter 7]. Scholarly interest in Said's ideas, moreover, is growing not only in the Arabic-speaking world, where he is already well known, but also in Europe. Of particular interest to readers eager for deeper insights into his life and works is a newly published monograph by

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[4] It is both notable and puzzling that Abdesammad Belhaj's chapter [2017] on Said appears in the edition in which it is presented under the heading 'Sufi'. It is notable because Belhaj's is at the time of writing the preeminent scholarly account of Said's thought in English, and the paratext significantly influences its reception. It is puzzling not only because Said does not actually evince clear Sufi influence, but moreover because Belhaj quite rightly does not argue that he does.

Paola Pizzi [2024] on the basis of her doctoral thesis at Sapienza University in Rome and the Parisian École Pratique des Hautes Études. The text adds considerably to what is written here, and in so doing prompt further discussion and research. Should the political situation in Said's native land change significantly in the coming years, one might perhaps anticipate there too a revival of his ideas.