Mahdi and Me:
Revolution and Messianism in Iran, Sudan and the Imaginary Domain

Table of Contents

Introduction 2
Chapter 1: Books 9
Chapter 2: Experiences 25
Chapter 3: Imagination 51
Conclusion 66

Appendix I: Bibliography
Appendix II: Glossary
To Allah belong the secrets of the heavens and the earth and the matter of the Hour is as the twinkling of an eye, or it is nearer still.

–The Holy Qur’an, Sura XVI: 77

Introduction

I have been lazy. I am daily confronted with three distinct piles of books on the coffee table that were diligently requested, checked out, carted home and have not been read. It’s getting to the point where I no longer regard them – even one of them – with hope. There are simply too many of them, and I cannot possibly get through them. Today, as a sign of true intellectual decrepitude, I dusted them all.

Last summer, when I began my job as a research assistant, I was tasked with writing a draft of an article for a senior political science professor. The article, I was told, was going to be a history of “Islamism” – that messy term now in employ for political Islam¹ – in Sudan. It would include major historical eras, figures of import, the current Islam-influenced government, and would be destined for a reference work entitled “Global Survey of Islamism.”² And so in late May, on my first afternoon of work, I walked across Haverford’s humid, lush campus, and sat down at a computer in Magill Library.

A draft would be due in some six weeks and I would be left largely to my own devices. And so I sat down at the computer faced with a mind-boggling infinity – or rather, with a very precise problem that spawns an infinity of other problems: how does one come to know things? I was a person who knew very close to nothing about my subject, who had only the faintest ideas of where, precisely, Sudan was, and who had never met a Sudanese person knowingly.

¹ Though I will not use quotation marks for the words “Islam,” “Islamism,” “the West,” and “the Arab World,” throughout the rest of this paper in order prevent sheer clutter, the reader should read the terms with the same kind of skepticism that quotation marks would imply.
² This research volume, which did eventually accept our submission, will be published under that title by Sharpe in early 2008.
Yet I was not, on that afternoon in May, in possession of a truly blank slate: as a student of political science and religion, as well as for other reasons, I had a nebulous kind of basic set of ideas and assumptions about my topic. I also had a very clearly defined idea of what was meant by “research.” Therefore, the time I spent grappling with the infinity was very brief: I immediately set to work making a list of every book the library had, or had access to, about Sudan.

Now I am sitting in my room, with my lists and with my piles, and I am dreaming about the Sudanese and Iranian Islamic revolutions. The lists and the piles are accumulated answers to the question, “what?” I cannot bring myself to read anymore of the books I have because I am caught in the day-dream of the question “why?”

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I am writing a senior thesis, which I will be turning in to both the religion and political science departments at Haverford College. When friends ask me what I am writing my thesis about, I usually say that I am writing about Iran and Sudan. Occasionally, I will say in a low, conspiratorial voice that I am writing something terribly subversive about Iran and Sudan. To my parents I say: the Middle East, and my mother asks, “Again?” When asked by my advisors or by relevant members of the faculty, I offer various ideas: I am writing about the role of political Islam in both countries, about the revolutions both have experienced, about the success of the Islamic governments in each. I mention that it seems to me that there’s a natural comparison to be made between them. And I note that both countries have a strong indigenous tradition of expecting a redeemer to come, in the form of the Islamic messiah-figure, al-Mahdi. Perhaps this tradition, I conclude, has lead to the success and authority that the Sudanese and Iranian Islamic regimes have enjoyed.
These responses are all within the accepted language of their audiences. But none of them reflect the project as I have performed, conceived and recorded it. Only my mother reflects partially on what is most central to my project: the biographical production of it, its return to my own experiences and imagination, “again” and again.

The experiences and events I’m referring to affected me both consciously and unconsciously, and have been the product of three countries, many years, many classes and several cataclysmic events. My thesis is, in short, a thesis on myself. Though I will be in constant dialogue with history, politics and current events, I am most interested in acknowledging and unearthing the way I’ve come to know things. Though I have a concrete argument about the genesis of Islamic governments, it is an argument whose real value comes from understanding what has persuaded me that it is true. My thesis, in short, reflects my life and a set of experiences. It is an archeological site. In attempting its excavation, I hope to illuminate ways in

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3 A Note on Photographs: My thesis, then, is profoundly, and indirectly, about media in the broadest sense of the term. I am concerned with categories of information, modes of production, and ways of communicating. This has informed not only my reflection on my own journey – the ostensible subject of this project – but also the process of communicating within the work. It has been a difficult challenge to attempt to speak things truthfully, clearly and thoughtfully. Photography, then, has not been designated a chapter in my thesis as a form of media because it is too central to everything to be parsed. Where words have failed, which happens often, I have resorted to the visual power of photographs: their power to speak in a language for the eyes to hear. The comfort I find is using photographs here is analogous to the comfort of taking pictures while traveling – it is a movement towards bringing the people back home into the experience. It feels more inclusive than any other form of communication, and comes closest to mimicking the category of knowledge that is experience.

I am, however, very sensitive to the problems of photography, especially the issue of exoticization. I have, therefore, consciously avoided pictures of unnamed or “iconically Muslim” people: the veiled woman, the man beating his breast over his child’s body. My friendships and experiences in the Middle East spur me to partially enter into the suffering or the desire for privacy – and to balk at such invasion and disrespect. Beyond this, I have used photographs largely without criticism because, for all their problems, they represent a lesser level of mediation or representation. They are the most vivid way to put a window on a page.
which Islam as such is learned and imagined, both within academia, and by this author who has been shaped first and foremost in (a no towers, post-9/11) America.  

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I believe strongly that academicians – and the world at large – would benefit from greater emphasis on their own subjectivity. Departments at Haverford, particularly the social-scientific realms of anthropology, sociology, political science and religion, are particularly concerned with the problems of representation and of rendering the voices and experiences of others in a respectful manner.

Last semester, I took a class entirely devoted to parsing this problem, which was a religion seminar about “ethical ethnography.” As a midterm paper, students in the seminar were asked to write a 7-9 page paper laying out their theory of how one can ethically conduct fieldwork. The first sentence of my paper: “Ethnography is complicated.” Field work – and this is little acknowledged – lies at the root of nearly all knowledge, and I believe that it is imperative to think critically about the impact its conduct has upon the product. Earlier in the semester, we read an ethnographic work about Afro-Brazilian religious experiences by a white anthropologist named John Burdick, and in a response paper to the book, I had this to say:

I find it confusing, then, that Burdick should feel the need so early on to justify his own undertaking of this work—to explicitly acknowledge, in his selection of Afro-Brazilian research assistants, the intuitive. For Burdick, this is “perspective,” as in: “As a white male middle-class North American Jew […] I needed all the perspective I could get.” Burdick “has some sense” that race, gender, etc. is crucial to the outcome of the project. Yet he produces the project anyway.

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Here the problem is one that we politely call race, or gender, or class: how can Burdick write a book about Afro-Brazilian women without being one? Yet the problem is more complicated than that and the imposition of categories like race is artificial. Rather, it appears to me now that Burdick’s problem was not one of belonging but being: his correct subject should have been himself, and his experience and interaction with Brazilian women. His desire for perspective, the desire to enter into his subjects, misses a fantastic opportunity to interact with them in a moment of self-reflection. The context ought to be the text.

For a final paper that I wrote two years ago on Lebanon, I read Edward Said’s seminal work Orientalism and some of his collected essays and shorter works. There is much in Said that expands upon this notion of subjectivity and its importance, as well as much that bespeaks the evils of ethnography. I am particularly indebted to Said’s discussion about representation:

Orientalism is premised upon exteriority, that is, on the fact that the Orientalist, poet or scholar, makes the Orient speak, describes the Orient, renders its mysteries plain for and to the West […] The principal product of this exteriority is of course representation […] My analysis of the Orientalist text therefore places emphasis on the evidence […] for such representations as representations, not as ‘natural’ depictions of the Orient.7 It is clear in Said’s discussion that the interaction of the scholar is anything but benign: that scholarship creates and employs certain linguistic and cultural tropes that are hard to now escape. And, groundbreaking for my thinking, Said asserts that it’s not a problem of using more “ethical” methods, but a problem with representation itself.

Said, however, creates a double-bind for me. Since I believe that the most fruitful scholarship will take place in the realm of biography and personal narrative, I am necessarily looking to disavow authoritative conclusions about Iran and Sudan. I am doing this both out of a conviction that better scholarship can be written on myself, and out of a respect for their alterity,

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their localization.⁸ As I seek to write my own subjective experiences, to unearth the ways in which language, scholarly precedent and biography have positioned me, I am also dabbling in Oriental mystery. Large sections of the work that follows are in conversation with imagination, stereotypes, visions and emotive responses. I will acknowledge freely here – and explicate further later – that my reasons for choosing Islam long ago were mysterious:

Dreamt of as a dizzy point that is the place of birth, of nostalgia and promises of return, the East which offers itself to the colonizing reason of the West but is indefinitely inaccessible, for it remains always a boundary, the night of beginning in which the West was formed but where it drew a dividing line.⁹ Since I believe so strongly in the centrality of subjectivity in scholarship, I cannot help thinking that I came to study Islam because I felt it would provide me with a space for a mysterious, non-rational kind of knowing. My own visceral aversion to the reification and violence of scholarship was affirmed in the sense that I believed Islam would always be outside my understanding, and that I would always be surrounded with the inexplicable and mystifying.

Aldous Huxley once said that life is short and information is endless: no one has time for everything – I will work with what is closest, most accessible. Faced with impossibly rich events and history, I fall back on subjectivity because I have to: because I believe, in deference to the complexity of the world, in the absolute failure of object-scholarship. For me, this failure is best evoked in a description of the language of the Qur’an that has guided the whole process of this project:

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⁸ I am working here in conversation with idea that "pre-Islamic belief concerning their Gods shows that the Arabs believed in a close connection between men and Gods: 'the Heavenly gods are always localized in definite sites on earth. The universality of this fact of localization is very remarkable.'" In the same way, I am seeking to keep my ideas out of the ether, and earth-bound to particular temporal and geo-spatial locations – as against the theoretical. This necessarily implies that “knowledge,” as such, will be more concerned with mystery than with facticity because these locations are multi-dimensional, dynamic and imagined in plurality. See: Oesterley, William. The Evolution of the Messianic Idea: A Study in Comparative Religion. London: Pitman and Sons, 1908. 147.

The text of the Qur'an reveals human language crushed by the power of the Divine Word. It is as if human language were scattered into a thousand fragments like a wave scattered into drops against the rocks at sea. One feels through the shattering effect left upon the language of the Qur'an, the power of the Divine whence it originated. The Qur'an displays human language with all the weakness inherent in it becoming suddenly the recipient of the Divine Word and displaying its frailty before a power that is infinitely greater than man can imagine. This project pays homage to the infinitely great and complicated worlds of Iran and Sudan, and the thousand fragments and threads that connect them to everything else. But its academic focus is on a world “many colored and richly storied” that is closer to home: my own process of figuring out how I’ve come to know what I know. If piles of books and lists of books have been one way of knowing – and I will start there, as I always do – there are others in play, producing and re-producing as I create and am in play with this idea of the Mahdi in Iran and Sudan. I am taking for truth what Rachel Carson once said: that if facts are the seeds that later produce knowledge and wisdom, then the emotions and the impressions of the senses are the fertile soil in which the seeds must grow.

[11] A quote from either Ulysses or Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, both by James Joyce. I painted a wall of my bedroom with a quote that contained fragments of both novels, and though I have the entire selection memorized, I can no longer recall from what works the various pieces originated.
Chapter 1: Books

When I made the list of books on Sudan, I was performing a ritual that I always perform. Like the veneration of totems, I have a dual consciousness about books. There is a sense of mastery and kinship with them: I understand how they work. I speak their language. I perform the rites of reading as a means to an end. It is an act of symbolic ritual appeasement, meant to bring on a good harvest, to make the academic sun rise. On the other hand, I have a completely non-rational fear of books. There is an order to the scholarly world, an insider’s hierarchy, which controls and commands. I must review the literature out of deference to a system I do not comprehend fully – I am not the expert. Further, there is a crushing weight to this system. One feels the staggering heaviness of the page, dragging along the footnotes at the bottom.

One of the main components of this dual consciousness is mimesis. As totems of authority, I have been trained to mimic their claims, and to patiently cite the arguments of others. Like Durkheim’s totemic religions, books have a quality of the sacred, as against the profanity of – well, everything else, including my own unsupported opinion. I am reminded of Abraham Lincoln’s observation that “books serve to show a man that those original thoughts of his aren't very new after all.” But my mimesis is linguistic as well as religious: like young children’s language formed in the crucible of inter-relations, I have come to speak, to read, and to write by catechistically reproducing. As a child often more preoccupied with literary friends than otherwise, books have an authority that is both totemic and linguistically parental. Even unread books, sitting in piles, give support to the assertion: I am writing a thesis whose quality will mime the quantity of books involved.

12 See Emile Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of Religious Life.*
This mimetic veneration is performative. The role of books is not functional, but formal. I realized this as I found myself increasingly drawn to the self-aware and self-critical works of anthropology and religion. The personal relationship I have to special books is entirely different from the duality and mimesis I have described above. When I have needed psychological comfort at various points during this project, I have returned to Rzyszard Kapucinski’s book Shah of Shahs, which speaks to me about bravery and about other ways of knowing. Or when I was younger: Notes from Underground by Fyodor Dostoevsky. These books and I are engaged in a highly developed relationship, like friends. And they underscore my ritualistic, constitutive and almost primal interactions with books writ large.

And yet despite all their varied and powerful influences over me, I am far from doing books justice. It is true for me at least that I only read in books what I am prepared to read. I have taken from books only ideas that I have already been on the way to understanding, or been ready to grasp, and so have undoubtedly failed to appreciate much of their wisdom. This is why I have not mentioned the wisdom and world of books as part of my interaction with them, though that may seem an oversight. I know that it is asserted that books can speak from beyond death, and can conjure up worlds that would be invisible to us otherwise. Yet I find most often in such cases that I am merely reflecting my own prejudices and predilections. In a book on Sudan’s Mahdist revolution in 1889, I see Lawrence of Arabia. I read descriptions of pilgrimage, but I cannot feel myself there, or claim to comprehend any of it. I find books to be self-affirming rather than exploratory, and so I always feel a kind of suffocation, too: it is not merely fear but also repetition of self that gives the heaviness.

But books possess facts, and we need to begin from some foundation. Ritual and mimesis will give us a place to start. Books – and lists of books – are meaningful because they show us
what we do not know. They outline the terrain we have to cover. They are filled with ellipses, and "pregnant with the future."\textsuperscript{13}

1. Facts about al-Mahdi and Islam

In Sura XVIII of the Qur'an known as "The Cave," as well as elsewhere in the Qur'an, there is a real sense that we are living in the last days, and that our deeds and piety may be called to task at this, or any, moment.\textsuperscript{14} The Hour of Judgment is both near and unknowable, given that "to Allah belong the secrets of the heavens and the earth and the matter of the Hour is as the twinkling of an eye, or it is nearer still."\textsuperscript{15} The Qur'an does not tell us when the end will come, and is constructed to give the sense that "eschatology can break out at any moment."\textsuperscript{16}

The Islamic idea of the end times is concerned with the Day of Judgment, the Day of Resurrection, and the coming of a messianic figure known as al-Mahdi. In general, the term \textit{al-Mahdi} means "the one who is guided by Allah".\textsuperscript{17} Broadly speaking, it is believed that al-Mahdi

\textsuperscript{13} The full quote is "The ellipses in the Qur'an are pregnant with the future," which is a particularly resonant way of thinking about reading: as a religious process of extracting meaning, while constantly being confronted with the future where reading will become knowledge. There is a real interplay in temporality where the process of reading is subsumed by the articulated future ends. See: Brown, Norman O. "The Apocalypse of Islam." Social Text. No. 8. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, Winter 1983-4. 163.

\textsuperscript{14} The Cave contains the story, familiar to the Western tradition, of the Seven Sleepers. A number of sleepers -- only God knows how many -- are asleep in a cave, closed off from the world, for hundreds of years -- only God knows how long -- and are noted as a pious and faithful. At any time, they might emerge and begin to question the people living in the time many hundreds of years after their own. The sleepers will wake at the end of time, to figure together in the Return of the Mahdi: the expected redeemer who will fill the world with justice. Given that this emergence will happen at any time, "the legend of the Seven Sleepers contains a perpetual threat of an eschatological outbreak." See Brown, Norman O. "The Apocalypse of Islam." Social Text. No. 8. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, Winter 1983-4. 167-70.

\textsuperscript{15} The Qur'an, Sura XVI, 77.

\textsuperscript{16} Eschatology: the branch of theology that is concerned with the end of the world, or of humankind; a concern with the final theological things like judgment, heaven, hell and death. See Brown, Norman O. "The Apocalypse of Islam." Social Text. No. 8. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, Winter 1983-4. 166.

\textsuperscript{17} Al-Mahdi is the passive form of the Arabic word \textit{hada} ("to guide") Though the term \textit{al-Mahdi} is not found in the Qur'an, the active form of \textit{hada}, \textit{al-Hadi}, ("the Guide") is found twice in the text. According to Hussein's translations, "the first verse states, 'Allah is surely the Guide of those who believe' (XXII, 53), while the second states, 'But the Lord is a sufficient Guide and Helper' (XXII, 33)." See Hussain,
will come to redeem the people and bring justice and righteousness back to the world immediately before the Day of Judgment.

There is a broad acceptance of the general idea of the Mahdi in the Islamic community, even though he is not explicitly mentioned in the Qur’an. The Prophet Muhammad is said to have mentioned al-Mahdi on several occasions, which have been recorded in collections of sayings known as hadith. One often-noted example from a reputable hadith collection by Sunni collector al-Tirmidhi:

The Prophet said: Even if the entire duration of the world's existence has already been exhausted and only one day is left before the Day of Judgment, Allah will expand that day to such a length of time, as to accommodate the kingdom of a person out of my Ahl al-Bayt (the household of Muhammad) who will be called by my name. He will then fill the Earth with peace and justice as it will have been filled with injustice and tyranny before then. The Mahdi, then, is a figure of redemption, as well as a political figure, who will emerge to lead the people and to bring justice back to a world that has become filled with injustice. It is not known when al-Mahdi will come, nor exactly who he will be. However, the traditions


For more information on hadith, modes of reliability and prominent collectors, see “Hadith,” Appendix II: Glossary.

Sahih Tirmidhi, Volume 2, P. 74-75.

These general ideas of a Mahdist redeemer were percolating in the early Islamic scene, infusing political language (and organization) with an eschatological sensibility. In fact, during the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphates, numerous political rivals and their supporters claimed the title al-Mahdi as a mechanism to leverage political support. This tact was also used by those in power, who often added al-Mahdi as a surname to their name or the names of their descendants. The second Abbasid caliph, Abu Dja'far, after suppressing a revolt in Medina led by a Mahdist claimant, gave his son Muhammad ibn Abd Allah the surname al-Mahdi, in order to give his reign legitimacy with the public. This idea of a politico-religiously salvific figure (and the idea of occultation) were well established in early Islamic society, informing heterodox beliefs that the Prophet himself had not truly died, and that various other figures, including Ibn Hanafiyya, the seventh and the eleventh Shi'i Imams were in hiding, or occultation. See Hussain, Jassim. The Occultation of the Twelfth Imam. London: The Muhammadi Trust, 1982. 29.

This contrasts with the Christian messianic tradition where the figure of redemption – Jesus Christ’s second coming – is well known.
attributed to the Prophet give some information about *al-Mahdi*’s lineage, and his appearance.

In both the Sunni tradition and the Shi’a tradition,\(^\text{22}\) it is believed that al-Mahdi will be descended from the Prophet through his daughter Fatima, and through her son Husayn, that he will share the Prophet's name, and that he will look and behave like the Prophet.\(^\text{23}\) In general, the Islamic world agrees on these basic ideas about the Mahdi, and expects him just as they expect the Resurrection and the Day of Judgment. In the Shi’a tradition, however, the *Mahdi* is a more complicated figure. For many Shi'i Muslims, the authority of the Prophet and the coming of the *Mahdi* are linked by a chain of Twelve Imams – spiritual and political leaders – descended from the Prophet's daughter Fatima.\(^\text{24}\) The Twelfth Imam, who has been in occultation (hiding) for over 1,000 years, is also the expected *Mahdi*. There are three basic ideas about the Mahdi in Shi’ism:

1. There will be twelve rightly guided Imams descended from Fatima’s son Ali, through his son Husayn.
2. A member of the household of the Prophet known as *al-Mahdi* will come into the community in a time of great sin and discord, and will redeem it.
3. This figure will be the Twelfth Imam, and he will emerge into the world out an extended, though unspecified, period of occultation.\(^\text{25}\)

According to Shi’a hadith, the Prophet asserted that there would be precisely and only twelve

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\(^{22}\) For more on the break in Islam between the Sunni and Shi’a factions, see “Shi’a Islam” and “Sunni Islam,” Appendix II: Glossary.

\(^{23}\) Hadith collectors including Kamal, al-Tirmidhi and al-Darimi are agreed on these details. On the issue of occultation, al-Tirmidhi's account does not mention it, though the others do.

\(^{24}\) Shi’ism is not a monolithic tradition, so while many – or most -- Shi’a Muslims are “Twelver,” meaning that they believe in the string of Twelve Imams, there are Shi’i who believe in a lineage of only seven Imams, or other combinations of Imams (see Appendix II: Glossary, “Ismaili,” “Sevener,” “Zaidiyah,” “Alawites,” and “Druze.”) In general, all Shi’a Muslims are unified by their belief that political and spiritual authority in Islam can only descend through the lineage of the Prophet and his family.

\(^{25}\) The idea of occultation was common in early Islam, as I’ve noted, as well as in messianic traditions in Judaism: in 1666, Sabbatai Zevi claimed to be the Jewish Messiah, and sought for some time to gain control of the Ottoman Empire, as well as redefine Jewish law. When he died in 1676, his followers asserted that his messianic mission was unfinished, and that he had gone into “occultation.” See Wilson, Colin. *Rogue Messiahs.* Charlottesville: Hampton Roads, 2000. 38.
imams who would come after him. The notion of occultation is what allows the Twelfth Imam to rise again as al-Mahdi.

The Shi‘a idea of the Mahdi emerged between 874 and 920. The occultation of the Twelfth Imam took place during this time – that is, the young Twelfth Imam, Imam Mahdi, disappeared. Right after his disappearance, from 878-940, there was still contact with the Imam through a series of four wakil (agents) on Earth who communicated messages from him. In 940, the fourth wakil said that the Imam would no longer communicate with the people, and that he had entered into greater occultation. The greater occultation, which has continued since 940, is a time where there is no regular contact with the Imam.

To live now -- in the period of Great Occultation -- is to live in a time where one must confront the unique absence of the Imam, and to grapple politically with the notion of personal responsibility this entails. Shi‘a faithful lack the guidance of the Hidden Imam, al-Mahdi and

26 al-Bukhari relates this hadith on the authority of the Prophet's companion Jabir ibn Samura. Sahih al-Bukhari, Vol. IV, P. 175. Hussein notes that this account is confirmed by accounts of other companions of the Prophet.

27 The idea of occultation, and the link between the figure of al-Mahdi and the Twelfth Imam, is found in the phrase al-Qa‘im ("he who will rise"), which is frequently joined with al-Mahdi in texts to refer to the one who will rise and, guided by Allah, bring righteousness. A hadith related in the Shi‘a tradition by Kamal, and attributed to the Prophet, says, "I am the master of the Prophets and Ali the master of my trustees, of whom there will be twelve; the first one is Ali and the last is al-Qa‘im." (Kamal, pg. 280.) According to Hussein, Shi‘i of the ninth century commonly referred to the Twelfth Imam as al-Qa‘im al-Mahdi. See Hussain, Jassim. The Occultation of the Twelfth Imam. London: The Muhammadi Trust, 1982.18.

28 The greater occultation began with the following communication from Imam Mahdi, transmitted by last wakil of the Hidden Imam, Abu‘l-Husayn as-Samarri:

In the name of God the merciful, the Compassionate! O Ali ibn Muhammad as-Samarri, may God magnify the reward of your brethren upon you! There are but six days separating you from death. So therefore arrange your affairs, but do not appoint anyone to your position after you. For the second occultation has come and there will not now be a manifestation except by the permission of God and that after a long time has passed, and hearts have hardened and the earth become filled with tyranny. And there will come to my Shi‘a house those who claim to have seen me, but he who claims to have seen me before the emergence of the Sufyani and the Cry (from the heavens) is assuredly a lying impostor. And there is no power or strength save in God the Almighty, the All-High.

"are living in the occultation [...] in which communication with the Imam is irregular, rare, unpredictable, miraculous. In this vision of history, modernity means the disappearance of authority." 30 And it is not clear whether the community can do anything to hasten the return of the Mahdi. In some hadith, there are hints that perhaps the community can prepare the way for the Mahdi's coming. 31 On the other hand, political leadership is reserved in important ways for the Mahdi. To assume a mantle of political or religious supremacy – or to lay claim to the title of Imam Mahdi – would be disrespectful to the authority of the Hidden Imam. 32 In Arabic, the term ‘Imam’ is used to describe a leader or prayer leader, but in Shi’ism, where the title was reserved for the Twelve infallible leaders of the early Shi’a, among ordinary people it carried awe-inspiring connotations. 33 In this way, there is a real tension: there are both revolutionary and quietist politics in the Shi’a doctrine of the Mahdi: both a desire and a waiting.

2. Facts about Iran

Iran today is 90% Shi’a Muslim, and is known throughout the world as an Islamic state. Yet the "Guardianship of the Jurists" under Ayatollah Khomeini and the extreme centralization of Iranian Shi’ism is a comparatively recent development in the history of that country's religious

31 Shi'i revolutionary Yazid ibn Abi Ziyad, who died in 754, spread the following hadith of the Prophet, acknowledged today as inauthentic, which nevertheless had great impact: God has chosen for us, the Ahl al-Bayt, the hereafter over this world. The people of my house shall meet misfortune, banishment and persecution until people will come from the east with black flags. They will ask for charity but not be given it. Then they will fight and be victorious. Now they will be given what they had asked for, yet they will not accept it but will finally hand it (the earth) over to a man of My Family. He will fill it with justice as it had been filled with injustice. See Abu Nu'aym and As-Suyuti, related by Thawban, as quoted by Muhammad ibn Izzat and Muhammad ‘Arif, Al Mahdi and the End of Time. London: Dar Al-Taqwa, 1997. Pg. 44.
32 In an conversation with Swarthmore religion Professor Tariq al-Jamil, a Shi’a Muslim and frequent traveler to Iran, he asserted that many people in Iran felt uncomfortable with Khomeini’s assumption of the title, “Imam,” saying that many people said “We don't like Khomeini because he tried to pretend he was Imam Mahdi.” Swarthmore College, March 21st, 2007.
experience.\textsuperscript{34} Around the time of the Prophet’s birth, Persia was under the rule of Sassanians, who had created a great empire with Persia at its heart. The Sassanians had ruled for over four centuries, and Persia under their leadership was a Zoroastrian land. In 651, the Sassanian Empire dissolved under siege from the Arab armies of the Caliphate, and by 674, the Caliph was nominally in control of large swaths of Persia.\textsuperscript{35} With the introduction of Islamic armies, Islam itself began to convert the local population. It was a slow process: it took Islam until the 10\textsuperscript{th} century to claim a majority in Persia. Meanwhile, the power of the Abbasid Caliph began to wane in the 9\textsuperscript{th} century, and over the next 200 years, a number of indigenous and localized dynasties arose throughout Persia. From 1055-1092, Persia was briefly unified under the leadership of the Seljuks. That was the last time Persia would see unified government for almost five hundred years: until 1502, Persia was fractured, pillaged and razed by Genghis Khan and his successors.

In 1502, a truly national government emerged: the Safavid Dynasty under Shah Ismail I who claimed descent from the Prophet through Fatima. All of present-day Iran was unified under Safavid rule – and all of it was introduced to Shi’ism, the religion of the Safavid Shahs. Shi’ism only became the majority religion in Iran under the Safavids in 15\textsuperscript{th} century. In 1736, a faltering Safavid court gave way to conquering armies of Nadir Shah, who also based his rule on religious authority and conversion.\textsuperscript{36}

In 1781, after some fractionalization following Nadir Shah’s assassination, the Qajar

\textsuperscript{34} See Appendix II: Glossary, “Vali-ye Faqih”

\textsuperscript{35} There was a great deal of ambivalence about the rise of Islam in Iran: ”[Arab Muslims conquests] have been variously seen in Iran: by some as a blessing, the advent of the true faith, the end of the age of ignorance and heathenism; by others as a humiliating national defeat, the conquest and subjugation of the country by foreign invaders. Both perceptions are of course valid, depending on one's angle of vision... Iran was indeed Islamized, but it was not Arabized.” See Lewis, Bernard. Iran in History. Tel Aviv University. Accessed at http://www.tau.ac.il/dayancenter/mel/lewis.html.

Dynasty took hold under the military leadership of Agha Muhammad Khan. During the 19th century under the Qajaris, Western science and technology were introduced and several of the Shahs traveled throughout Europe. The Qajar Dynasty also saw the rise of real colonial interference in Persian affairs.\(^{37}\) By the end of the 19th century, the Qajaris were weakening and local spiritual and political forces were stepping into the vacuum. There was a strong push amongst the clerics and intellectuals for a constitution that would guarantee some rights to the people, control the monarchy, and create a consultative popular assembly. In 1906, the Shah Mozaffar-e-din signed a constitution and a limited bill of rights.\(^{38}\) The increasingly weak Qajar leaders consistently ignored the constitution. In 1921, an officer in the Persian military named Reza Khan supported a coup against the last Qajari Shah, Ahmed Shah Qajar. By 1925, Reza Khan became Reza Shah Pahlavi, and the new shah. His son, Muhammad Reza Pahlavi, who assumed the throne in 1942, was the last Shah of Iran.

The Iranian encounter with Shi'ism, then, is comparatively modern. The notion of politically engaged clerics is even more recent: until the weakening of the Qajar Dynasty in the late 19th century, Shi'ism -- in Persia as in elsewhere -- was largely decentralized and politically quietist.\(^{39}\) In the break down of political order that accompanied the end of the Qajar Dynasty,
the clerics took on many of the duties of state, including welfare, legal, administrative and religious responsibilities: "the ulema had not only their own effective tax system, but also their own private armies of students and retainers, so that they commanded considerable areas of what we might call government, including much of the legal and nearly all of the educational and welfare systems." Around this time, clerics throughout the Muslim world were having a serious discussion about the role of interpretation, politics and the power of scholars and jurists. Some like Egyptian Muhammad Abduh and Syrian intellectual Rashid Rida were interested in renewal of the religious and political realms, arguing that wiping away the false impositions of earlier generations could reverse the stagnation of Islam. In Abduh’s main work, *The Theology of Unity*, he argued particularly for the possibility of modern *ijtihad* (interpretation) in order to return to the true principles of Islam. In Iran, two schools emerged over this question of *ijtihad*. In the end, the usuli school won out over the more non-political akhbari school:

The usuli school said that every believer must choose a trained *mujtahid* to follow in law and doctrine. In the early 19th century, there developed the notion that, ideally, there should be one *marja' e taqlid* (source of imitation) who could issue fatwas binding on all believers. [...] This ideal, along with the development of binding rulings by *mujtahid* (whose older and more influential one came to be called ayatollahs, and, at the top, grand ayatollahs), created a kind of fluid hierarchy and organization among Iranian Shi'is. The role of some of the Shi’a clerics in Iran, then, changed radically in the late 19th century. Their political engagement continued until the Islamic Revolution of 1979, with which they were centrally involved. The massive protests that sparked the abdication of the Shah were at the

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urging of clerics – and particularly at the words of Ayatollah Khomeini, in exile as a political dissident. Khomeini was a particularly strong adherent to the *usuli* school, and believed the ayatollahs should assume a kind of guardianship over the people.

3. Facts about Sudan

Sudan’s territory, like the Nile civilizations to its north, has long been organized into kingdoms. From about the time of Christ (100 AD) until the time of Muhammad (600 AD), the area of the southern Nile -- present-day Sudan -- was dotted with city-states collectively known as Nubia. Several of these Nubian kingdoms were Christian.\(^{43}\) As the Muslim armies expanded out of Arabia in the century after the Prophet Muhammad, they conquered every land they encountered, expanding across North Africa, as well as to the east and the north. Once the Arabs—who had captured Egypt in 640—attacked Nubia and realized they could not take it by force, they concluded a treaty with the Nubians in order to facilitate friendly trade and interaction between the two states.\(^{44}\) Between 1300 and 1500, the Nubian Kingdoms began to fracture, and the area saw increasing Arabization through intermarriage, trade and settlement.\(^{45}\) In addition, Islamic scholars and Sufi *turqa* (brotherhoods) traveled into present-day Sudan and established schools and mosques, spreading Islam into the countryside, and instructing followers in the

\(^{43}\) The Christianity practiced in Nubia was heavily influenced by the more eastern orthodox traditions, and bears a great deal of resemblance to the Coptic Christians to the north in Egypt.

\(^{44}\) The Baqt Treaty was signed in 652 between the Nubian King Qalidurat and the Egyptian ruler Abdallah ibn Abi Sarh. It stipulated that neither country would attack the other, and allowed for the free passage of goods and people between the Northern Nile and the Southern Nile at Aswan, the only fixed frontier that the Islamic Empire ever formally recognized. See Adams, William. *Nubia: Corridor to Africa*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977. 453.

Islamic practice. In 1504, the leader of the African Funj tribe, Amara Dunqa, led an army against the old Nubian Kingdom of Alwa and founded the Funj Kingdom with its capital at Sennar.

The Funj Kingdom had been working under an amalgamation of Christianity and indigenous African beliefs, but in 1523 they officially converted to Islam. It was “an African, not Arab, state, but derived its ideological force from the newly introduced religion of Islam.” The Funj divided their tributary lands into administrative sections called dar; the area of Darfur was the tribal home of the Fur people. In 1620, Sulayman Solong, a Fur clan leader, broke off and became Darfur’s first Sultan, and decreed that Islam would be the official religion. The area of present-day Sudan, by the mid-17th century, was home to two ostensibly Islamic states. The Darfurians, for their part, actively sought to expand the influence of Islam by encouraging religious scholars to settle there, expanding the construction of madrassas and mosques and—under the reign of Ahmad Bakr from 1682-1772—advancing a policy of forced conversions to Islam. The Funj, on the other hand, took a passive approach to the spread of Islam. They encouraged and subsidized the immigration of religious teachers, and underwrote the heavy costs of Sufi schools, but did not actively try to transform social life along Islamic

46 The Sufi turuqs are a crucial part of Sudanese history. These trans-national orders represented a more mystical and usually more heterodox forms of Islam that adapted easily to the existing religious practices of the lands they settled. The Sufi orders, between the 13th and the 16th centuries, were the main force for expanding Islam. In Sudan, the Sufi turuqs served as religious, economic and political forces, and coalesced into major political parties in the 18th century.


48 The Sufi brotherhoods were not instrumental in advancing Islam in Darfur, as they were in Funj Sudan: individual, often only semi-literate, holy men were encouraged to settle by the offer of land and tax-exemption status for the faqir and his descendents. See O’Fahey, R. S. and Spaulding, J. L. Kingdoms of the Sudan. London: Methuen, 1974. 165-68.

49 They introduced the Maliki School of Islamic jurisprudence and provided, as Muhammad Mahout asserts, "a stable state framework within which the dissemination of Islam and the Arabic language was given a vigorous impetus,” the state was not actively interested in transforming the social or cultural life along explicitly Islamic lines. See Mahmoud, Muhammad. “Sufism and Islamism in the Sudan.” African Islam and Islam in Africa: Encounters Between Sufis and Islamists. Ed. David Westerlund and Eva Evers Rosander. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1997. Pg. 163.
The Funj and the Darfurians, however, were progressively weakened by internal fracture and in 1821 the leaders practically welcomed the Ottoman Egyptian armies of Pasha Muhammad Ali. Ali, who was appointed Pasha by Istanbul in 1805, had been desperately trying to gain control over Egypt. Ali was seeking to consolidate his power by controlling the Nile headwaters, and was also looking for Sudanese slaves to build a slave army that would be loyal to him. The Ottoman rule over Sudan was marked by heavy taxes and limited development, and for those Sudanese who were not paid off by the Egyptian-Ottoman rulers, there was marked discontent.

The Sudanese got their deliverance from Ottoman rule – and now British as well, as Egypt gradually came under British influence – in the form of Muhammad Ahmad, a faqir (holy man) and leader in the Sammaniyah Sufi brotherhood. Beginning in 1880, Ahmad preached struggle against Ottoman/Egyptian/British rule. He proclaimed himself to be the long awaited divine leader of Sudanese eschatology: the Mahdi. In 1882, Ahmad’s followers, known as the Ansar, defeated a 7,000 man Egyptian army, and their own ranks swelled to more than 30,000.

The Sufi brotherhoods crafted a uniquely Sudanese Islam, where “Arabization and Islamization built on the pre-existing Sudanese social structures and embraced even the pagan belief systems and practices. In racial, cultural, and religious terms, what emerged is a mold that is uniquely Sudanese.” These Islamic states bequeathed a tradition of state involvement in religious affairs to the Sudanese political imagination.

Ali was trying to gain control over the country by ousting the Mamluks, who had considerable influence in the military and government at the expense of the Ottomans. In 1811, Ali massacred over a thousand Mamluks in the Citadel of Cairo, and thousands more throughout Egypt; a band of Mamluks fled the slaughter to the haven of the Funj Kingdom in the South. Ali’s invasion in 1821 was provoked by the small state these Mamluks formed at Dunqulah. The Mamluks were a military class under the Abbasid Caliphate, and under the Ottoman Empire. Originally slaves, they became crucial to the power of rulers because of their military prowess and lack of connection to the existing power structure, and over time gained political influence. They ruled Egypt from 1250 until 1517, when Egypt was conquered by the Ottomans. Even after this defeat, the institution of the Mamluks survived and they held provincial governorships (beys) and controlled the military. In the late 18th century, Egypt was attacked by Napoleon and began to fracture, and to re-establish Ottoman control, Muhammad Ali was appointed Pasha, and began to eradicate Mamluk influence and power.
By 1885, the Mahdi and his Ansar controlled all of present-day Sudan, and had created the first indigenous national government. The Islam of the Mahdiyya -- the Mahdi's government -- was puritanical and stringent, and Islamic law was introduced and enforced in its more extreme forms. Women who left their homes unaccompanied, who were unveiled or who spoke at full volume were flogged. Visits to the tombs of Sufi saints were banned and variant and local forms of Islamic practice were absolutely rejected.

As the Mahdiyya expanded their military control in 1882, the British, hoping to avoid a costly military entanglement, ordered a withdrawal of all Egyptians and foreigners from Sudan. General Gordon, who had been the governor-general of Sudan until 1880, was sent to supervise the evacuation in 1884. Gordon realized he could not evacuate without additional troop support, but by the time British reinforcements arrived, Gordon and his charges had been massacred.

For a few years, the British were understandably wary of involvement in Sudan, but by 1892, the

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52 The Mahdiyya was the product of both localized Sudanese traditions—the Mahdist myth of deliverance—and various imports from outside the country: the Mahdist tradition draws heavily on the African jihadists in Nigeria and West Africa, who were distinguished scholars whose religious views rested on a tradition of authoritarian and unchallengeable authority. See Mahmoud, Muhammad. “Sufism and Islamism in the Sudan.” African Islam and Islam in Africa: Encounters Between Sufis and Islamists. Ed. David Westerlund and Eva Evers Rosander. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1997. 171. It also reflects the Wahhabist movement of the Hijaz, in today’s Saudi Arabia, which sought to establish a purified Islam that railed against Sufi and other localized innovations. The rise of the Mahdiyya in the 1880's was the culmination of a century of aborted and failed attempts by Mahdists claimants to take power in Sudan, riding a "mood of eschatological expectation, which appears first in Egypt in the late 18th and 19th centuries, reflecting the popular consciousness that traditional Islamic society was threatened both by infidels from without and despots within." See P.M. Holt. "al-Mahdiyya." Encyclopedia of Islam. Vol. V. Leiden: Koninklijke Brill, 1989. Pg. 1248.

53 The massacre of General Gordon at Khartoum is one of the central dramas of the British colonial experience, and is memorialized rather dramatically in the film Khartoum and in poems like Rudyard Kipling’s “Fuzzy-Wuzzy (Soudan Expeditionary Force).” Gordon was surrounded at Khartoum by the Ansar in March of 1884. It took immense British public support for his relief before the government began to arrange a rescue force. Gordon’s refusal to leave his troops and his popularity in Britain forced Prime Minister Gladstone to create the ‘Gordon Relief Expedition’, which finally arrived in Khartoum on January 28, 1885, two days after the Ansar had taken Khartoum and killed Gordon. His manner of death is uncertain, despite being dramatically immortalized in George William Joy’s painting General Gordon’s Last Stand.
re-conquest of Khartoum had become a political necessity. The British began to muster a counter-offensive to reclaim Sudan for Egypt, and a joint British-Egyptian army marched south along the Nile in 1896. In two years, the war was won; 11,000 Mahdists died at Omdurman in the last ditch battle against Lord Kitchener’s forces. The Anglo-Egyptian Condominium, as the joint British and Egyptian colonial rule was called, basically reinstated the Sudanese colonial status that had existed under the Ottomans. The British and Egyptian protectorate over Sudan ended with the 1953 Anglo-Egyptian accord, which gave Sudan three years to transition to self-government. The newly elected Sudanese parliament unanimously adopted a declaration of independence in 1956.

Over the next thirty years, Sudan would oscillate between brief and ineffective parliamentary periods and lengthier dictatorships. The country, poor and underdeveloped at independence, slid deeper into economic distress as it defaulted on international development loans and squandered its resources. On June 30, 1989, the third parliamentary period in Sudan’s history was abruptly ended by a coup led by a group of military men under the leadership of General Umar al-Bashir. Bashir establish the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) for National Salvation, and set to work governing the country in adherence to Islamist principles. Under the RCC and its ally, the National Islamic Front of Hassan al-Turabi, Sudan became the second country in the world to govern according to Islamist principles, and the first Sunni country. Joining Iran, Sudan became

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54 The British were facing competition in the Nile headwaters from French, Italian and Belgian aspirations, and the planned construction of an irrigation dam at Aswan needed the security of a subjugated Sudan.
55 The RCC imprisoned the major leaders of the National Islamic Front, in a double bid to both increase the legitimacy of the NIF by distancing it from the coup, and give the coup more international authority by avoiding the taint of hard-line extremism. The bid worked, as the regime was immediately recognized by Egypt and the US, despite their inauspicious beginning. Hassan al-Turabi, the ideological leader of the mutineers, spent a few comfortable months in jail, and then emerged to a position of prominence and centrality in the new government.
a magnet for Islamist individuals and groups, many with terrorist pedigrees, including Osama bin Laden and his Al Qaeda network. Over the next seven years, Sudan cultivated its dual status as both global pariah, and as magnet for Islamic and Arab political organizations.
Chapter 2: Experiences

Thoughts are the shadows of our feelings - always darker, emptier and simpler.  
- Friedrich Nietzsche

It’s the loneliest thing in the world to come back from traveling. With a head full of sights, sounds, feelings and experiences, one must be content to relay platitudes and the occasional anecdote. Suddenly, the worth of a whole complex event of travel is reduced to isolating you from the world.

My worst experience of this sort came about two weeks after I returned from Damascus, Syria. I was in a bookstore in Philadelphia with a friend, when I saw that The Economist had a title story on Damascus. Enthralled, I drank in every photo, every sentence. My friend, gazing over my shoulder, was a source of remarkable annoyance: she was incapable of seeing anything I was seeing. She had no eyes, no comprehension, no language. We were reading different magazines. Our pasts made our experiences of a shared moment completely divergent.

I have the urge to take you back with me, to all the relevant scenes and experiences, in this moment where I want you to see what I see. We need a common language. I know that my positioning is arbitrary, but its history is fixed. I have come to know what I know because of where I have been.

This idea of experience extends beyond just my past, however. Experience is part of how we make intellectual sense of theory and ideas. In Sudan and Iran, the experiences of Islamic government after its conception have made it known in a thousand ways to the Iranians and Sudanese. Sudan and Iran’s experiences have made theory known to me as it is fleshed out and translated to policy. In watching the institutionalization of ideas, the logic of the thought is
illuminated and made known – the layers seem to unfold. As books and experience inform and engage one another, the theories and policy of government play and interplay.

In short, we need to see what has happened, what the experience has been with Islamic government. And in order to show you how I’ve arrived where I am and where we’re going, I need to take you back to where I’ve been, and where Iran and Sudan have been:

We have to be there at the birth of ideas, the bursting outward of their force: not in books expressing them, but in events manifesting this force, in struggles carried on around ideas, for or against them. […] An analysis of thought will be linked to an analysis of what is happening […] at the point where ideas and events intersect.56

I. Aladdin

When my brother and I were in grade school, we used to put on variety shows in our garage for our family and neighbors. We exclusively used songs from three albums: Steve Miller Band’s Greatest Hits album, Carole King’s album Tapestry and the soundtrack from Disney’s animated feature Aladdin. The soundtrack from Aladdin was a gift from my father, and Andrew and I were obsessed with it, and with the movie. The songs reverberate now in my memory: my little brother singing the urchin Aladdin’s lament:

Riffraff. Street Rat. I don't buy that! If only they'd look closer... Would they see a poor boy? No sir-ee! They'd find out there's so much more to me!57

Aladdin and Jasmine, his love interest, live in a world populated by the accoutrements of an “Arabian Nights” mystique. A massive walled palace that evokes the Taj Mahal dominates their

fictional city, Agrabah, and the lanes around the walls are filled with markets and shops nestled within catacomb-like buildings.

Memories of the architecture, many years later, returned to me as I watched the footage of the Arab neighborhoods in the film *The Battle of Algiers*. Jasmine’s cloistered life in the palace is one of idle sumptuousness: fountains, tame tigers, cages of doves and expansive divans populate her quarters. Her sexy attire further evokes the harem theme. Her father, the Sultan, is conspired against by his “advisor” Jaafar, who dabbles in all sorts of magic, dark arts and sorcery. Aladdin himself is a figure of triumph: from a beggar to a Prince – but he only achieves his successes because he is the accidental master of a powerful genie.

The narrative of *Aladdin* follows a familiar story line: poor, virtuous and crafty boy pulls himself up by his boot-straps, good triumphs over evil, and the hero gets the girl in the end. Most of what has stayed with me has been the imagery: the fire-swaller, the swords and almost-amputation for shop-lifting, the pushy merchants, the camels and the desert sands. And what has stuck to me the strongest: the oft-repeated line in the film that “everything is not what it seems.” The plot’s main play is that of illusions and disguises. Jaafar frequently makes use of costume, disguise and, later, shape-shifting, to entrap Aladdin, Jasmine and the Sultan. Aladdin himself makes the claim that his beggar-persona is a false front: that “there is so much more to” him. Later, he has the genie give him all the trappings of prince-hood, and tries to pass as one in order to win Jasmine. Jasmine also dresses up, and wanders around the city in disguise.

*Aladdin* gives, more than anything, the sense that the world of the characters is a world of layers, unseen hidden meanings and disguise. It gives the impression that is a complicated

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58 The Taj Mahal, built in 1684, was constructed in Agra, India by the Muslim Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan as a mausoleum for his most beloved wife, Mumtaz Mahal. It is one of the most iconic examples of “Muslim” architecture.
place that cannot be read on appearances. It is a “city of mystery and enchantment.” Even if, as a child and since, I have rejected many of the more obvious stereotypes of the film, this impression of hidden meanings and mystery has remained. The first things one ever learns about a place or an event tend to leave inerasable traces.

II. Shari’a

Shari'a – Islamic law – is a broad set of laws and precepts derived from sayings of the Prophet, rules in the Qur'an, and norms of behavior (based on how the Prophet and his family acted.) Despite this generality, Sudan and Iran have experienced shari’a in localized and different ways. The call to institute Islamic law is based its broadly social applicability: its supporters say that the rules of shari'a, if followed, are the basis for a just, Islamic society. In the same way, calls for an Islamic constitution are often little more than calls for shari'a to be enshrined in the political and legal frameworks of a country. Iran has a constitution that explicitly references the Islamic nature of government, and which expands beyond simply instituting shari'a. The 1979 Iranian constitution stipulates that ‘sovereignty belongs to God’ yet gives God’s vice-regent, the vali-ye faqih (the guardianship of the jurists), nearly absolute power. For Khomeini, Islamic government is “constitutional, in the sense that those in charge of affairs observe a number of conditions and rules underlined in the Qur’an and in the Sunna and represented in the necessity of observing the system and of applying the dictates and laws of

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60 See Appendix II: Glossary, “Shari’a” for a more complex look at the term.
61 In many countries with sizable Muslim populations, mentions of shari'a in the constitution are part of the effort to appease indigenous Islamist movements. For example, in Bangladesh’s national constitution, Article 2A states that “the state religion of the Republic is Islam, but other religions may be practiced in peace and harmony in the Republic”. In Pakistan, the Preamble to the National Constitution affirms that “Whereas sovereignty over the entire universe belongs to Almighty Allah alone, and the authority to be exercised by the people of Pakistan within the limits prescribed by Him is a sacred trust.” In Egypt’s constitution, Article 2 states that “Islam is the religion of the state. Arabic is the official language, and the principle source of legislation is Islamic Jurisprudence (shari’a).”
Islam." 62 Here, Islamic government requires a religious leader to enforce and interpret shari'a, rather than the people's simple obedience to the shari'a. 63

In Sudan there is no constitution, an oversight largely due to wrangling over shari'a. Despite this, parts of shari'a were enacted into law in 1983. Col. Nimieri, who had been the Prime Minister since 1969, had begun his political life as a self-styled Arab Socialist. 64 Nimieri’s embrace of the Islamist movement in Sudan was the cornerstone of his 1977 National Reconciliation with opposition forces, and to cement this new alliance, he appointed Hassan al-Turabi chairman of a new committee for the “return of the laws to compatibility with the shari’a.” 65 Nimieri’s shift from socialist military officer to Islamist—who insisted that his officers swear allegiance to him personally as the Imam of the Sudanese umma—was a dramatic one. Turabi pushed Col. Jaafar Nimieri to institute shari’a as part of the price of the coalition between the Colonel and the Islamic Charter Front. When shari’a and the hudud punishments were instituted in September 1983, Turabi and other dignitaries attended the ceremonies of the first enforcements: hundred of barrels of wine dumped into the Nile, public executions and

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63 This is an unorthodox reading of constitutionalism and Islamic government. For other Islamists like Hassan al-Banna (the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt), Islamic constitutionalism was about providing a check on the power of leaders: "When one considers the principles that guide the constitutional system of government, one finds that such principles aim to preserve in all its forms the freedom of the individual citizen, to make the rulers accountable for their actions to the people and finally, to delimit the prerogatives of every single authoritative body. It will be clear to everyone that such basic principles correspond perfectly to the teaching of Islam concerning the system of government. For this reason, the Muslim Brothers consider that of all the existing systems of government, the constitutional system is the form that best suits Islam and Muslims." See Hassan al-Banna. ‘al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun fi ‘ashar sanawat.’ [Speech to the Fifth Conference of the Society of Muslim Brothers]: 1939. Al-Nadhir. No. 35, 1357/1939. P. 22.
mutilations. Turabi blanched, fell to the ground and lost consciousness upon first witnessing an amputation. When the NIF came to power in 1989, they re-affirmed the country's commitment to shari'a.

Implementation of shari'a in Sudan and Iran has disproportionately affected women and religious minorities. Khomeini’s “major social measures in the early stages of the revolution were to enforce Islamic dress on women, the abiding symbol of an Islamic society, and to ban alcohol; but in other areas he moved more cautiously, for example banning unacceptable films but not films as such, unacceptable music, but not music as such.” In Sudan, apostasy was articulated as a criminal offense. In both countries, the leadership left room alongside shari'a for modern jurisprudential review or ijtihad. Historical precedent was found to justify rules against particularly modern problems. The historical rules of shari'a were applied in broad brush strokes.

III. Terror

When I was 16 years old, I was a 11th grader at Boise High School, and I was taking debate class for my zero hour class. This class met at 6:50 in the morning, and consisted of gossiping about politics, running an occasional practice round, and napping with our heads on our desks. Stan, the coach, would sit at his desk in the corner, drinking coffee and listening, with the volume low, to the radio.

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67 This notion that shari'a provides a broad, interpretable framework has roots in early 20th century Islamic political thought. Sayyid Qutb, an Egyptian ally of the Muslim Brotherhood, asserted the centrality of legal principles to Islam and its government in his work “Social Justice in Islam,” writing that “Islam has survived by laying down the general, universal rules and principles, and leaving their application in detail to be determined by the processes of time and by the emergence of individual problems.” See Sayyid Qutb. Social Justice in Islam. Pg. 104.
I do not recall feeling upset or very shocked when he turned the TV set on, and we watched video of smoke coming out of the first tower. I remember watching the second plane hit in real time. I was somewhat pleased that I was up early enough to see it as it happened. Other people wouldn’t see it until later. In each class throughout the day, we watched TV footage, except for my math class. The teacher wouldn’t let us watch coverage because he said that it was vulgar and upsetting.

I don’t think we talked about it too much in Boise, Idaho in the days and weeks afterwards – it was an event experienced like a hurricane or a volcanic eruption in another country. I had never been east of Montana; my mother had been to Detroit five years before I was born. Immediately, everyone I knew assumed the culprit was someone like Timothy McVeigh, the Oklahoma City bomber. We had anti-government separatists living in the woods north of town. We had Ruby Ridge.

My grandfather had moved to Idaho some years before in order to “live free,” and my neighbors could persuasively talk about the need get rid of Big Government – and I did not agree, but understood and comprehended what they were saying. Though the ostensible culprits of the 9/11 attacks were Muslims, they were against the government and this was intelligible to us. The events provoked sadness and dismay, not confusion or righteous condemnation. Of course, there were those who whispered that the government was so rotten as to be capable of anything – that the government could be behind the attacks. In insinuated ways, this also had plausibility.

68 The conspiracy theory media that percolated after the September 11th attacks, including the infamous “Let’s Roll 9/11” documentary and others, had a lot of traction in Boise, and were circulated and covered in the main stream press. In response to the slews of letters to the editor received by the Idaho Statesmen (largest circulating daily paper in the state) supporting conspiracy theories, for example, an editorial was published on October 5, 2006, admonishing people: “There have been a number of letters published recently that have stated that the 9/11 atrocity, yes, it was an atrocity, not a tragedy, was staged by our
The third terrorist attack, after the U.S. and Madrid – the one in London – had a more immediate impact. I was driving with the head of an orphanage into Damascus when I first heard about the bombings of the London transit system. The director told me very gently. I had already been feeling, for some weeks, particularly vulnerable and exposed. This assault – London was where I changed planes to get home – left me silent for minutes. I felt trapped, as if the world was being closed to me, my exits blocked. This was an attack that was intimate to me and I felt a welling up of anger.

The notion that Syria might be attacked like Iraq haunted everyone in Damascus. It was a constant source of anxiety for my friends and hosts. There was a great deal of hand wringing after London. From the distance, we got second hand news from Lebanon, and had no idea what the American or British response would be. I felt alternately trapped and angry. That I should be cut off – that my friends might suffer a retaliation for events beyond their control – that there should be no better response – that Muslims would put other Muslims in such danger. I began to feel the conflict, fear and anger that I had not felt from Boise. It swept me up like a tornado, and the city spun deliriously as we waited.

IV. The Great Satan

Using anti-American rhetoric – The Great Satan, Death to America – is one thing. Conducting a foreign policy on that premise is far more complicated. Both Sudan and Iran have conducted their foreign policy with the zeal of missionaries: working hard at converting others to their Islamist, anti-Americanism through economic incentives, persuasion, and the creation of government. These people believe that the Twin Towers were imploded and the whole thing was a pretext to start the Iraq war. I feel trying to refute their silly facts and theories is pointless. How sad it is that anyone could honestly believe that our elected government.” To this day, I find a great deal of plausibility in some of the claims, as do most of my friends and family – of all political inclinations. See www.letsroll911.org.
common enemies. They have worked to support one another, and to give aid to nascent Islamic revolutions in other countries. Both Sudan and Iran have been accused of supporting or engaging in terrorism against the US and other targets. Both countries have been on the US State Department list of State Sponsors of Terrorism for over a decade.

Sudan has not merely supported the Islamist goals of other organizations: it has actively sought to redefine international Islamism. Particularly under the leadership of NIF leader Hassan al-Turabi, Sudan took a leadership position in the early 1990’s, unifying various organizations and seeking to mollify tensions between them. Turabi envisioned a Sunni-Shi’a unity that would facilitate the broader revolution, and he welcomed Hezbollah and the Iranian Revolutionary Guards to Sudan with almost as much pleasure as he welcomed bin Laden and Al Qaeda. To this end, Turabi, with President Bashir’s blessing, quietly organized a meeting of terrorist groups in an organization that he called the Pan Arab and Islamic Congress (PAIC). Delegates representing over 40 states attended the first PAIC General Assembly, which took place in Khartoum from April 25-28, 1991. Turabi presided, and was elected secretary-general. Yasser Arafat and representatives from Hamas attended, as well as bin Laden, members of the Filipino Abu Sayyaf movement, Imad Mughniya of Hezbollah, Tunisian leader Rashid al-Ghannushi, Anwar Haddam of the Algerian rebel group FIS and Ayatollah Mahdi Karrubi, head of the Iranian Society of

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69 It’s almost impossible to compile a comprehensive list of all the accusations of terrorism that have been thrown at Sudan and Iran. Directly, Sudan has been implicated in the first World Trade Center bombing, the bombings of the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania and the assassination attempt against Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. Indirectly, Sudan has supported the global work al-Qaeda, especially, as well as other terrorist organizations. Iran has been accused of supporting sectarian violence in the second Iraqi War, fueling the civil war in Lebanon through military support to Hezbollah and direct terrorist activities against American interests in the Republic like the US Embassy take-over.

Combatant Clergy. The group covered all the geographic, sectarian and ideological ground of the global Islamist movement. He envisioned the PIAC as a way to assemble “Muslims from all over the world”, overcoming “internal divisions, Shi’a, Sunni, differences in jurisprudence or spiritual orders.”

In 1994, Hassan al-Turabi claimed that there were no Iranian military personnel in Sudan, “not one Iranian businessman or even tourist.” Despite these kinds of dubious claims, Iran’s relationship with Sudan strengthened politically, economically and militarily in the early 1990’s. The common commitment to Islamist government was the obvious link between the two countries; Turabi was personally committed to the relationship as an example of rapprochement between Sunni and Shi’a Islamist organizations. In November 1989, after the ground had been prepared by a visit to Teheran from Ali Osman Taha—then the Second Vice President of Sudan—the heads of Iran and Sudan met in the Iranian capital, where President Bashir sought to secure support for the new Islamic state from Iran. President Rafsanjani agreed to send personnel and support for a major road-building project, and the two countries agreed to cooperate on security and intelligence matters. Turabi worked diligently over the next several years to build working relationships with the Iranian mullahs, and facilitated, with Osama bin Laden, a training alliance between the Iranian sponsored Lebanese Hezbollah and bin Laden’s Sudan-based Al Qaeda.

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74 Burr and Collins. Pg. 48, 75.
In September 1991, an Iranian military delegation visited Sudan to provide assistance, and to prepare a military cooperation pact. In late 1991, President Rafsanjani traveled to Khartoum on a state visit, where he proclaimed the North-South civil war a “jihad” that should be pursued with all vigor. To underscore this point, he also presented Sudan with a gift of $300 million in Chinese arms. For the next several years, Iran assisted with military materials and guidance, Sudanese commercial development and jihadist training in the various terrorist camps around Khartoum. Similar to what they had done with Hezbollah in Lebanon’s Bekaa Valley, Iran was using Sudanese soil to advance the training of its extra-military extremists. Sudan was also providing Iran with the use of Port Sudan, and Iranian warships occasionally appeared in the Red Sea en route to Sudan. The Iranians, since 1979, had been working from a position of extreme anti-Americanism and vehement opposition to the state of Israel. Khomeini spoke early and often about the sins of the Great Satan -- the United States -- and about the need to fight western imperialism. His support of the students who seized and held the American Embassy in Teheran confirmed that America was Khomeini's nemesis.

This sense that the US is the Great Satan has also permeated Sudanese foreign policy. The situation in the western province of Darfur, which has been labeled as genocide, has been

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77 The rhetorical use of the phrase Great Satan has continued to this day. See “Great Satan Warned of Burning Hell.” The Guardian. February 16, 2005. http://www.guardian.co.uk/elsewhere/journalist/story/0,1415966,00.html. Other non-aligned countries have also taken to using the term or iterations thereof: Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez recently compared U.S. President Bush to Satan, noting he could still smell the sulfur from where he was standing at the UN podium. See "Chavez Savages Bush in Speech," Washington Post, September 21, 2006 at http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/chronicle/archive/2006/09/21/MNGPDL9LRN1.DTL&type=politics.
78 Despite this, there are signs that Khomeini's proclamations have not effected long-term perceptions of America in Iran: Western consumer and cultural products are more popular there than ever. See Azadeh Moaveni. “How the Great Satan Became Just Great.” Time Magazine. November 6th, 2002. http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1101021111-386942,00.html.
difficult to solve because of Sudan’s unwillingness to host US or UN troops. The Sudanese government has called for “jihad” against any UN or American troops that might come to Darfur. President Omar Bashir has refused the presence of troops with “colonial and imperial ambitions.” The head of Sudanese security and intelligence has allegedly taken loyalty oaths from his men to become martyrs rather than see Sudan host UN troops. On April 23, 2006, Osama bin Laden, long linked to Sudan and to the NIF government, and one time Khartoum resident, released an audiotape calling on “the mujahideen and their supporters in Sudan [...] and the Arabian peninsula to prepare [...] to wage a long-term war against the Crusaders in western Sudan.” There is a great deal of posturing about the evil intentions of America in both Iran and Sudan: comparable to the situation vis-à-vis Darfur, the Iranian Embassy crisis was based on a fear that the embassy was a den of US and Zionist spies sent to bring down the Islamic Republic.

V. Economics

In Islamic economical jurisprudence, Muslims are enjoined to pay the zakat, which is a kind of alms to the poor of the community. The giving of alms is one of the five pillars of Islamic practice. In Islamic economics, it is one of two main principles governing banking, taxation and wealth. Only the ban on usury has a comparable centrality. In Iran and Sudan, the state has become injected into this experience of pious charity. In Sudan, the NIF regime strongly supports Islamic banking practices. President al-Bashir announced upon taking power that shari’a would continue to govern the country as it had for a half dozen years. His

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82 The amount of the zakat varies based on the income of the person who is paying it, but is usually about 2.5% of one's income. The money can only be given to certain sectors of society in fulfillment of the tithing duty: the poor, needy travelers, to free captive, to win others over to Islam or to release oneself from debt. To calculate your own personal zakat requirement, see: http://www.contactpakistan.com/downloads/zakatcalc.xls.
proclamation re-affirmed an expansive set of Islamic economic practices, including the state collection of zakat and the banning of usury. A collection of quasi-governmental organizations like the Diwan al Zakat and the Islamic Pious Endowments were established to regulate the expanding Islamic economy.\(^3\)

Islamic banks had been thriving in Sudan for the past decade, beginning under Col. Nimieri’s government. In the 1980’s, as the country’s economic crisis deepened and traditional investors were divesting, Islamic banks and businessmen expanded under the assistance of tax incentives, access to hard currency and political connections to the powerful Islamic Charter Front. For example, the Faisal Islamic Bank reaped spectacular profits because of its exemption from profit and capital taxes and banking regulations.\(^4\) Nimieri’s regime, increasingly Islamist in orientation, encouraged the Islamic economic institutions with large-scale exemptions from private sector regulations. The banks mainly served the economic interest of the ICF and other Islamists who helped establish and expanding Islamic banking in Sudan. The Islamic banks were often owned or linked to the Saudi royal family, which supported the politically ambitious Islamists of the ICF in Sudan.

In Iran, the support for Islamic economic policies is much weaker than in Sudan. There were few people advocating Islamic economic models leading up to the revolution, and Khomeini gave only lip service to the idea.\(^5\) The leftist revolutionary contingent had a strong influence on the economic policies of the Islamic Republic, which were more rhetorically

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oriented to notions of Marxism and Arab Socialism. But these notions of egalitarian economics were heavily influenced by Islamic notions of social justice, harkening back to the principle of zakat. They are also in conversation with myths about the Mahdi. There is a tradition, emerging primarily in the 8th century, that al-Mahdi would be extremely generous with money. On the authority of al-Khudri, "the Prophet said: There will be in my community a Mahdi [...] money will at that time be in heaps, and whenever a man will get and say, 'O Mahdi, give me,' he will say, 'Take.'." Another tradition recounts that the Prophet foretold, "At the end of my community there will be a caliph who will pour out the money without counting it." In pre-revolutionary Iran, economic grievances had topped the list of complaints against the Shah, and the revolutionaries were careful to address the need for a socialist egalitarianism.

There was also the sense that God had particularly blessed the Islamic governments of Sudan and Iran, by providing them with immense oil wealth. By 2000, oil had single-handedly allowed Sudan to achieve a trade surplus for the first time in 20 years, and in 2005 Sudan was producing an average of 363,000 barrels of crude oil per day at its Unity and Heglig fields in the South. Iranian nationalization of oil companies in 1948 provided Iranians with the sense that oil was part of the political life and entitlements of the people. Khomeini’s promise to share the

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86 These ideas still have serious traction in Iran, particularly with the lower classes, who elected Mahmoud Ahmedinejad in 2005 largely on the basis of his populist and socialist rhetoric.
89 The Shah's 1974 economic plan was overly ambitious and failed completely, squandering oil resources without improving the standard of living for average Iranians. As the Shah squandered resources, the economy was beset by inflation, unemployment and shortages. Concurrent to this economic meltdown, the Shah and his Empress spent lavishly and dress ostentatiously. See Wikipedia, "Iranian Crown Jewels," at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iranian_Crown_Jewels.
resources coming in from the National Iranian Oil Company performed the hadith that the Mahdi would be a man of great generosity.91

VI. Violence

As I planned my summer of research and work in Damascus, Syria, I wasn’t at all nervous. My mother was a nervous wreck; the committee reviewing my grant application had wanted to see a beefed up “security plan.”92 It wasn’t until I got off the plane and walked past guards with loaded AK-47s that I began to feel a little nervous myself.

There is something about life in America that does not prepare one for violence, or for the accoutrements of a visible military and security presence. If I were to see armed soldiers walking around Haverford’s campus, it would become immediately clear to me that something had gone terribly, apocalyptically wrong. It would signify martial law, massive civil disorder – a nuclear exchange? For all our military might, the US is the land of the invisible soldier. It is also a place without violence, despite the crime and gore on the nightly news. The violence of the state, or of other states, exists without leaving traces or pockmarks. It is a clean and bloodless violence. 9/11 happened on the TV screen.93

91. On the authority of al-Khudri, "the Prophet said: There will be in my community a Mahdi [...] money will at that time be in heaps, and whenever a man will get and say, 'O Mahdi, give me,' he will say, 'Take'” and "At the end of my community there will be a caliph who will pour out the money without counting it." See W. Madelung. "al-Mahdi." Encyclopedia of Islam. Vol. 5. Leiden: Koninklijke Brill, 1989. 1232.
92. Syria has a travel warning in place by the U.S. State Department, which caused some degree of concern. The current travel warning, put in place after I left, details the attack against the American Embassy – an example of fears coming to fruition. From the State Department Travel site: “On September 12, the U.S. Embassy in Damascus was attacked by assailants using improvised explosives, gunfire, and two vehicles laden with explosives. However, the Embassy perimeter was not breached. This attack underscores the presence of terrorist groups in Syria that have the ability and intent to target American interests. The Embassy is working with the Syrian authorities to address these threats and the security issues raised by the attack on the Embassy.” See http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/tw/tw_3036.html.
93. The problem of media coverage vis-à-vis atrocities and violence is a fascinating study. Though it can anesthetize us to the horrors of violence, it can also aspire to a kind of intimacy with, and culpability far, violence. An excellent example of this is the recent launch of the partnership between Google Earth’s
In Damascus, there is a strongly material military presence, ranging from the aforementioned machine gun toting soldiers on patrol in the airport – and in the marketplace – to the ubiquitous truckloads of soldiers being moved about the city and countryside. Even the police force is overshadowed by the Mukhabarat, the military secret police, who handle much of the day-to-day issues of crime in the city.\(^9\) During the summer, there were several incidents of political violence in the city: a car bomb was detonated in the tourist area on Mt. Qassion, and a small “terror cell” engaged with the police in a shoot-out before being “mopped up.” After I left, I would hear about an unsuccessful attempt to breach the security walls of the American embassy with car bombs, small arms fire and improvised incendiary devices.

In Damascus, I began to feel a vague but consuming paranoia. I was not afraid of being under surveillance, or of being killed in some attack, I don’t think. It was merely the absolutely crushing weight of the presence of violence. Even the bloodless visuals of violence – the soldiers – made me feel sick with my own mortality, with the potential for senseless destruction.

After a month in Damascus, my Syrian friend and I took a weekend trip across the border into Lebanon, and into Beirut. Beirut was calm at that moment, by outward metrics, but it was seething and building pressure. Along the road, political posters littered the towns and suburbs. Our host was a Lebanese U.N. employee who lived in a Shi’a neighborhood in the Beiruti southern suburbs – now since destroyed by Israeli munitions. He told me about the political tensions, the unstable coalitions going into building a government after the “Cedar Revolution” the preceding year.

\(^9\) Mapping software and the U.S. Holocaust Museum. They have created a downloadable overlay for the map of Darfur, Sudan, which highlights atrocities, burned villages and destruction as a means of spurring political action through visuals. See Crisis in Darfur Program at http://www.ushmm.org/googleearth/.

\(^9\) During my stay in Damascus, I visited the wealthy cousin of a Syrian friend, who invited me to spend the afternoon in the women’s section of the house. The matriarch spent much of my visit on the phone with members of the Mukhabarat, whom she was pressing to recover a diamond tennis bracelet that had been stolen from her during a party the night before.
I had hoped a trip to Beirut – where there was no police state, and I could eat McDonald’s – would allow me to regain some of my sanity. But Beirut is a graveyard of violence, seething with the undead. Buildings everywhere, ubiquitously, are tattooed with bullet holes, craggy from mortar fire.

As we walked along the waterfront, we tried to keep our eyes on the Mediterranean, and away from the skeletal Holiday Inn and the shattered remains of abandoned apartment buildings.95 And then suddenly we were faced with police tape, and a few lazily armed security guards. Beyond them, months after the original explosion, lay a massive crater carved out of the road, over a block long. On either side of the street, halves of the buildings had been sheared off. Charred and burned out cars, unmoved, lined the street beyond the crater. I saw it in June: Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and 21 others had been assassinated in a massive explosion on February 15th.96

In Beirut, the visuals of the violence were overwhelming. Hezbollah’s flags and posters surrounded our host’s apartment: American desecration of the Qur’an is a violent act!97 Over that weekend, an opposition journalist was killed when her car exploded. Unable to stand any more, I went home to the U.S. the next week. I am still averse to the violence and bloodshed of the revolutions, and am unable to view them as mere collections of principles, or ideals. A year later,

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95 The Holiday Inn in downtown Beirut was notorious during the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990). It was used regularly as a location for snipers because of its size and centrality. In response, it was heavily shelled, and remains a hulking, bombed out presence in the Beirut skyline.

96 The explosion that killed Hariri occurred in the fashionable, seaside tourist district in Beirut, in front of the St. George’s Hotel. The explosive force was roughly equivalent to the detonation of 1,000 kg of TNT.

97 This was during the general outcry over suspicion that American officials at the detention center in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba had desecrated the Holy Qur’an as a means of interrogating prisoners. Officials were accused of flushing a Qur’an down the toilet, among other things. The story was first publicized in an April 2005 article in *Newsweek*, but the allegation of Qur’an desecration has been a consistent complaint of detainees and former detainees.
watching Lebanon, the pressure – the pockmarks – the nauseating foreboding – and then the Israeli bombs –
VII. Conversion

If a country is run by the precepts of a religion, then political life, rights and citizenship are contingent on adherence to the religion. In Islamic Sudan in the early 1990’s, religious conversion was the goal: by the book or by the sword. As Sudan sought to become an Islamic state in the early 1990’s, a concerted effort was made to convert non-Muslim populations in the south of the country – or to destroy them. A program known as the Comprehensive Da’wa was initiated in South Sudan between 1992 and 1996, with extensive funding from Islamic charities, in order to facilitate the process of Islamization. The project sought to unify education, proselytizing, humanitarian development, economic assistance and counter insurgency efforts by establishing camps for black Africans where they would be instructed in the Qur’an and in obedience to Khartoum. Apostasy was articulated as a criminal offense. The civil war that continued to plague the country was re-conceptualized as a cultural war to capture the South for Islam. The NIF poured money into the war and it formed the conscripted Popular Defense Front (PDF) that forced northern Muslims to wage a bloody and intractable battle against the southern rebels in the name of Islam. The government also began a propaganda campaign to cast the war as a religious struggle. In 1989, Hassan al-Turabi had characterized the southern war as a jihad; in 1992, six pro-government ulema in Kordofan issued a fatwa in support of jihad in the south-

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98 The Arabic word “da’wa” literally means ‘summons,’ ‘an invitation,’ or ‘to invite.’ It refers to the “invitation” of other to Islam – to proselytizing. It also connotes an obligation on Muslims to invite others to Islam. The Qur’an does provide some support for an Islamic missionary project. See Sura An-Nahl, 16:125 – "Invite (all) to the Way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious: for thy Lord knoweth best, who have strayed from His Path, and who receive guidance." Hassan al-Banna used the notion of da’wa in a wider sense, as a "mode of action by which moral and political reform were to be brought about." See Hirschkind, Charles. "Civic Virtue and Religious Reason: An Islamic Counter-Public.” 1990. Ed. Drobnick, Jim. Aural Cultures. New York: Yyz Press, 2004.

central Nuba Mountains. This rhetorical shift is clear from the way the government elicited military aid from its Arab allies: by describing the war as a jihad being fought against enemies of Islamic Sudan.

In Iran, the official and unofficial militias and gangs were instrumental in establishing and solidifying the Islamic State. In some cases, the gangs were part of Khomeini’s power structure; eventually, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard would be the most advanced iteration of this theme of state police and guards. But in the early stages of consolidation, the streets were also filled with groups like the Hezbollahis who were largely uncontrolled by the government. They would harass married couples, secular students, and unveiled women, urging them to follow the precepts of Khomeini’s Iran. Some of these groups only had the appearance of being beyond government control:

In the street [the government] wielded power through organized gangs of strong-arm thugs known as Hezbollah. […] In the early months of the revolution the pretense was maintained that the Hezbollah represented the spontaneous will of the people and that Khomeini and the Revolutionary guard had nothing to do with them and could not control them. Later eyewitnesses would describe the paramilitary organizations as the visible and fear-provoking arm of the new government – the eyes in the street – describing them in “cavalry formation, riding in great armadas through the streets on their motor bikes, traditional Shi’a black flags and banners held aloft, and sometimes preceded by a mullah in a bullet proof Mercedes.” And the movements against counter-cultural behaviors accelerated as the revolution is consolidated: novelists were jailed, TV was censored by a blind minister of culture, publishing houses and books stores were burned down, women were subjected to virginity

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tests\textsuperscript{102} -- Salman Rushdie's novel \textit{The Satanic Verses} was met with a fatwa from Khomeini calling for his assassination.\textsuperscript{103} Anything that was part of the old regime was demonized as 'western' or decadent. The revolution began to engage Theodor Adorno's claim that "the highest form of morality is not to feel at home in one’s home." Being a Muslim in Iran meant being following the edicts of Khomeini more than the edicts of the Sunna.

In the same way, amongst the Muslim populations in the Sudanese North, there was religious pressure to be the right kind of Muslim: the kind that supported the government's policies. Muslims who were of a different political orientation from the NIF suddenly found their religiosity attacked – as well as their person and property. The notorious “Ghost Houses” of Khartoum began to appear, and stories of disappearances and torture were whispered throughout the city. Many prominent Muslim politicians were exiled or jailed. In 1992, the government invaded the headquarters of the DUP and the Umma in Khartoum North and tortured Sid Ahmad al-Hussein, the most senior member of the DUP, and arrested the Khatmiyya leader Sheikh Muhammad al-Haddiya.\textsuperscript{104} The regime was resolutely violent in its suppression of its opponents.

An older Sudanese man missing a leg confronted Turabi at a speaking engagement in France, and asserted that the government had tortured him until he lost his limb. In response, Turabi


\textsuperscript{103} The fatwa against Rushdie was pronounced by Khomeini on Radio Teheran, and included all the editors and publishers of the book under the death sentence. The full text of the fatwa reads: “The author of \textit{The Satanic Verses}, a text written, edited, and published against Islam, against the Prophet of Islam, and against the Koran, along with all the editors and publishers aware of its contents, are condemned to capital punishment. I call on all valiant Muslims wherever they may be in the world to execute this sentence without delay, so that no one henceforth will dare insult the sacred beliefs of the Muslims.” The fatwa has since been upheld (in 2005) by Khomeini’s successor, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. See Wikipedia “The Satanic Verses,” for a timeline of events surrounding the fatwa at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Satanic_Verses_(novel).

\textsuperscript{104} Burr and Collins. Pg. 90.
asserted, “Islam does not permit such things.”

VIII. Al-Mahdi

The mother of the Twelfth Imam was a Byzantine slave girl named Narjis Khatun. [...] She became the daughter of the Byzantine Emperor, who was informed in a vision that she would be the mother of the Mahdi. The Tenth Imam, Ali al-Hadi, bought her for his son the 11th Imam, Hasan al-Askari. The usual miraculous accounts of his talking from the womb, etc. may be passed over to the only occasion on which he is said to have made a public appearance. This was in 874 when the Eleventh Imam died. It appears that none of the Shi’a notables knew of the birth of Muhammad [the Twelfth Imam] and so they went to the Eleventh Imam’s brother, Ja’far, assuming that he was now the Imam. At this juncture a young boy came forward and said: ‘Uncle, stand back! For it is more fitting for me to lead the prayers for my father than for you.’ The boy was seen no more, and Shi’a tradition states that from that year he went into occultation.

At Samarra, Iraq, beside the gold-domed Shrine of the Imams Ali al-Hadi [the 10th Imam] and Hasan al-Askari [the 11th Imam] is a mosque under which there is a cave. The end of one of the rooms of the cave is partitioned off by a gate, which is called Bab al-Ghayba and was built on the instructions of Caliph an-Nasir in 1209. The area behind the gate is called the Chamber of the Occultation and in the corner of this is a well, down which Imam Mahdi is said to have disappeared. Shi’is gather in the rooms of the cave and pray for his return.

This mosque, known as the Al-Askari Mosque or the Golden Domed Mosque of Samarra, was bombed on February 22, 2006 at about 6:55 am local time. The golden dome was destroyed in the bombing. The attack sparked a massive wave of sectarian violence in Iraq, as it was immediately assumed that Sunni extremists were behind the assault. In the two days following the attack, over 200 Sunni mosques were destroyed or damaged, and at least 165 people were killed. Some reports also assert that up to 25 Sunni clerics were killed or kidnapped. Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmedinejad asserted, however, that the U.S. and Israel were behind the attack, asserting, "these heinous acts are committed by a group of Zionists and occupiers that have failed," a claim echoed by the leader of the Lebanese organization Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah. By Monday of the following week, almost 400 people had been killed, and 500 wounded in the fighting. Al-Mahdi has not been just a myth or a character, but has played out in physical, manifest and violent ways.

IX. Orientalism

June 2005
Qodsaya, Damascus, Syria.

10:22 pm

Listening to the birds tonight and thinking morose – interesting? – things, I heard the ezan start in swollen, halting Arabic from the minaret just down the hill in Qodsaya village. Inspired, I suppose, by the romance of things like the ezan, I grabbed my keys and headed out into the cool, dark evening to listen to the ezan echo around me in the village. I walked the circular path that marks the edge of the houses and the playground, perched on the hill above town, and settled on

the end of the village closest to the mosque, facing the road to Damascus. The houses in Qodsaya are cement and cinderblock, but in the nighttime they are only illuminated by their interiors, and they have a faint, unshakable shadow of the way things have been, the catacombs of stone and balcony of the past. The yellows of the houses, windows and lamps, cars heading up the valley past me north to Homs, Aleppo, yellows headlights and horns blown at imagined passersby in the dark. The minaret is tall between the swell of the two hills, nestled in the valley along the road, illuminated like all Damascus by the green neon lights along the dome and minaret. This green and yellow is like a modern oasis in the darkness of the desert, splashed into the arid landscape of the day with colors and life at night. As the ezan ends, I watch the people move onto their balconies, dark shapes against the vibrancy of curtains and light, and one of the hundreds of stray village cats cautiously approaches me, and rubs her head along my hand. She is nursing some of the dozens of kittens that play in the lavender or under the dumpster during the heat of the day, and now she, like others, is roaming at night while they sleep. I can see all the way to Mount Qassion from here, car lights snaking up the hillside to the cafes and greenery of the summit, where people establish elaborate picnics on traffic islands, late into the night. I have never been up so late that I haven't seen them there, with nargileh and food and children, only burned away as the hot sun rises. Right below me is Al-Rawabi Restaurant, flashing a string of blue lights across the road, and covered in posters of Arab pop icons, pulsing with life. After a few more minutes like this, I move further along the path back towards the houses, and walk the lovely path between the lavender hedges towards the playground. There are swings like I always wanted to have, set wide apart, with big seat, padded with a kind of leather cover. From here, swinging, the village is open to me, everything: the round mothers in hijab, slowly savoring the walk back from conversation in the house next door, the light in Mr. Imad's office as he finishes
the business of the day and calms his mind painting pictures of old Damascus and flowers in vases, the hushed and final sounds of children until tomorrow. I like this way of being, the insistence on savoring all the contrasts and mysteries of the evening, this picnicking under the pressures of the night's possibilities, of finding a middle ground between awareness and sleep. This dream wraps everyone in Damascus in romantic notions, and gives everything hot and modern, a cool, Oriental glow.
Chapter 3: Imagination

My expectation of the mysterious in the study of the Islamic world is a complicated problem. On the one hand, I feel that there is a strong theoretical argument to be made that we must expect the mysterious in every object of study. Just as I am unknown to others, so are others unknown to me. And I believe that there is a way to present this mystery with respect and not exoticism. But my conscious use of the word mystery as against alterity or another choice reflects ambivalence. Though I mean to acknowledge the unspeakable complexity of certain events in Iran and Sudan, I also believe that there is truly a veil between them and myself. It not just that there is always mystery but that here there is mystery to a higher degree. Recognizing my feeling that the Islamic revolutions are “more unknowable” presents the eternal return of my Aladdin past: “land of mystery and enchantment.”

In acknowledging this, I go a little ways toward unearthing the source of my argument. I am drawn to the arguments of Turabi and Khomeini because they seem to feel this mystery, too. Their location within an Islamic tradition allows me to justify my own feelings as something other than Orientalist longings for mystery. It is to my delight that Turabi acknowledges the impotence of rational scholarship in understanding the power of the revolutions, saying:

By human standards, it would be difficult to explain the success of the orphan Prophet Muhammad or that of his followers after him. Nor can one easily explain the success of Islam in the Sudan, this poor country with a meager Islamic tradition, or the fall of the Shah of Iran who had a strong, armed force and full American and Soviet backing. Here, in the fatalism and divinity that Turabi perceives, I think that our first feelings of awe and stupor converge. “By human standards,” it is impossible to tell a causal and neat story. There is a

complexity, an alterity that encourages reflection, religion, paradox and imagination. Even further, this feeling seems to exist within some of the Iranian people themselves. The power and the incomprehensible rise of Khomeini against all odds produces the feeling that he must be divinely appointed, beyond the pale of ordinary men.

It is perhaps my understanding of political events that gives me this feeling of mystery. In the success of anything unexpected, there is the feeling that social scientific understanding has broken down. Where economics, politics, religion and sociology cannot predict or convincingly explain, they leave a singularity.\textsuperscript{112} The moment of revolution is like the moment of the creation of the Universe. Modern astronomical knowledge can tell what the universe was doing at 10^(-22) seconds \textit{after} the Big Bang, but it cannot give the convincing answers to the questions of genesis: what is happening at the Big Bang? Or, maybe more interestingly, what is happening right before the Big Bang that leads to it – why the Big Bang? Or, what happens inside a black hole, where light cannot escape to give a picture of events?\textsuperscript{113}

\textsuperscript{112}A singularity is a mathematical as well as astronomical term. In math, it is a point at which a function is undefined – neither differentiable nor single-valued – while the function is defined for every other point in the area. In astronomy, a singularity refers to a region, like a black hole or the moment of the hot Big Bang, where gravitational forces cause matter to be infinitely dense. As a result, space and time are infinitely distorted due to the relativistic effects of the mass and density.

\textsuperscript{113}The universe in general has a uniform curvature due to relatively uniform distribution of mass. In Minkowski space, or flat space, the equation for the curvature looks like this:
\[ \Delta s^2 = \Delta x^2 + \Delta y^2 + \Delta z^2 - c^2 \Delta t^2 \]
One of the ramifications of this formula is that time always progresses in a linear fashion, unstoppably, whereas distance and motion are variable. In a black hole, this doesn’t always hold. The ring around a mass at \( r = 2GM/c^2 \) is known as the Schwarzschild Radius. If the mass of the object is inside its Schwarzschild Radius, then the object in question is a black hole. It is also an object with a escape velocity of greater than the speed of light. Interestingly, if \( r < \text{Re} \) (as is the case for black holes) then the equation of curvature becomes:
\[ \Delta s^2 = \frac{\Delta r^2}{r^2} + \frac{(1 - 2GM)}{c^2} \Delta t^2 \]
Here, the signs on the space and time metrics are reversed, moving becomes inevitable, as time is in flat space. To the outside observer, a victim falling into the black hole seems to slow and come to a stop in time.
There is only one way to attempt to access the point of singularity: imagination. Using the books and the pictures and the experiences as the characters, sets and script, we must close our eyes and daydream. We must be playwrights. For the characteristics of revolutionary singularity are thin and quick:

The causes of revolution are usually sought in objective conditions -- general poverty, oppression, scandalous abuses. But this view, while correct, is one-sided. After all, such conditions exist in a hundred countries, but revolutions erupt rarely. What is needed is the consciousness of poverty and the consciousness of oppression and the conviction that poverty and oppression are not the natural order of this world.\(^{114}\) The consciousness, the catalyst, must be as impossible to pin down as the origin of the Universe, a constantly receding point of such a fundamental nature as to be impossible see as an object. For there are the events as they were recorded, and the words as they were uttered, but the wherefore and why eludes us:

There is a distinction between 'what actually happened,' events as seen by the eye of historical materialism, and 'what is really going on' [...] as seen by the inward, the clairvoyant eye, the second sight. The form and content of the folktale obliges us, as it has obliged all subsequent Islamic culture, to make the distinction between literal meaning and something beyond -- in Islamic terminology between \textit{zahir} and \textit{batin}, between outer (exoteric) and inner (esoteric); between external-patent and internal-invisible-latent; between materialist and spiritual \\textit{meanings}.\(^{115}\) In the work of imagination, I can make visible the world of a material moment – the location of the revolutionary overflow – and an invisible world of emotion, of revolutionary consciousness. The business of this imaginative work, however, has no relation to facticity as such. It is an instance of play. The only proper response to a singularity – a moment of ponderous breakdown and excess – is the performance of wonder through imagination.

\begin{flushright}
\textbf{CHARISMA}
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In important ways, I think that the shift to the *usuli* doctrine in 19th century Iran can be traced to latent psychological tensions in the doctrine of the Shi'a Imams and al-Mahdi. The original split over succession in favor of Fatima's family has imbued Shi'ism with a focus on charismatic or divine leadership: the blood of Prophet gives a divine mandate to his successors to rule and provide guidance. This guidance is needed on both religious and political matters and thus "the rejected leader Ali is to be identified not simply with the principle of hereditary legitimacy, but also with the assertion of charismatic authority after the Prophet, and inspired interpretation after the Qur'an."  

Political legitimacy, in this tradition, is based on divine guidance, which certain people of the blood of the Prophet are granted. Shi'ism contains within it this feeling "for the presence in certain members of the Family (Mohammad's) of special qualities of political leadership or spiritual guidance, in short, of charisma."  

Within this idea of transmission of authority by bloodline, there is also a sense that this rule must cover all aspects of life -- religious, social and political order -- and be correct without compromise, "closely associated with the belief that the ideal form of rule is autocratic."  

The belief that legitimate political authority is autocratic and charismatic fits in perfectly with the doctrines of the *Usuli School*, where each person must select a source of imitation "to follow in law and doctrine." As these clerics were already in control of important sections of political life, their monopoly over their charges appears to have nearly absolute. And with the rise of the desire for *one* source of imitation -- a grand ayatollah -- the political leanings of the Shi'a community were almost completely expressed.

Khomeini seems to emerge into this latent desire with all the force of propaganda and all

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the magic of charisma. I have written, again and again on notebook paper, as if he embodies the whole problem to me: Why Khomeini? Why was Khomeini able to be the charismatic figure? What are the key characteristics of Khomeini? "Traditionally fatalist, deprived of coherent social organization, the displaced poor were mesmerized by clerical agitation around the themes of Islamic justice and the voluntary equalization of wealth," and in this mesmerization, there was the urge for a charismatic leader. 119 Charisma, as a type of political legitimacy and basis for authority, also concerns it self with the question of individual leaders and their personal persuasiveness. 120 "There is the idea of charisma, either personal or familial or divinely bestowed, attaching to particular leaders. The most distinctive characteristic of Shi'ism in general is indeed the cult of the charismatic leader." 121 The characteristics of Khomeini's charisma:

1. In being old, he seems to transcend time, to represent the weather-beaten and bent Iranians themselves. He embodies and performs the weariness of the country -- he is as old as Iran itself, and has borne her history, sufferings, ill usage.

120 In thinking about charismatic leadership, I am guided by Max Weber’s definition: "Resting on devotion to the exceptional sanctity, heroism or exemplary character of an individual person, and of the normative patterns or order revealed or ordained by him." See Weber, Max. Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology. New York: Bedminster Press, 1968. 215.
The local fanatics believe Khomeini is the Twelfth Imam, the Awaited One, who disappeared in the ninth century and has now returned, more than a thousand years later, to deliver them from misery and persecution. That Khomeini almost always appears in photographs only as an aged man could be taken as confirmation of this belief.122

2. His rise to power carries a sense of divine inevitability. He is not killed, imprisoned or silenced by the Shah or by SAVAK.123 Because he succeeds (and against such heavily armed Imperialists), it becomes transparently clear that he was divinely meant to succeed. His grasp of power legitimates itself.

123 Especially in the 1970’s, many clerics were arrested, tortured, put under surveillance or killed for their political positions. Leaders including Ali Khamenei, Mahdavi Kani, Hashemi Rfsanjani and Musavi Ardebili were all imprisoned or internally exiled. Several others were killed, likely under torture. See Moin, Baqer. Khomeini: Life of the Ayatollah. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999. See also Glossary II: Appendix, “SAVAK.”
Reason requires that there should be a leader at all times, that this leader should be infallible [and that he is such that] one is secure against his committing any bad deed.\textsuperscript{124}

3. An emphasis on piety and austerity\textsuperscript{125}, he lives in a meager room in Qom, where there is only a thin mattress on the floor, and a Qur'an. He is a pious and well-regarded Ayatollah. He eats little. After 1979, he sits on the mattress with crossed legs and receives Heads of State. He is 82. When he is tired, he closes the door, and reads his Qur'an.

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\textsuperscript{125} The charismatic political authority that stems from austerity and piety is covered very interestingly in Frederick Nietzsche, “What is the meaning of aesthetic ideals?” Nietzsche, Philosophy and the Arts. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. 128-148.
His ability to control himself, his powerful will, gained the admiration and respect of others. Mastery over self eventually led to mastery over others. He [performed] both personal expressions of repentance through self-flagellation and outward political acts of revolutionary self-sacrifice.\textsuperscript{126}

4. Like the Twelfth Imam, like Imam Mahdi, Khomeini had to go into a kind of occultation as protection against enemies who would destroy him – exile in Iraq, Turkey and France. His return heralds the righteousness of the returning Imam Mahdi, the restorer of society.

\textit{For the average man and woman it was almost as if the Hidden Imam of the Shi’a, their Messiah, had reappeared, albeit not in Mecca as tradition would have it, but on an Air France charter flight.}\textsuperscript{127}

The notion of the Mahdi carries with it the idea of the Return to History: that the Mahdi, having been in occultation, bodily represents a person from the past, who has come to return those characteristics of justice and piety to the present. This return to roots, a reaching backward for authority, resonates with Khomeini’s characteristics of charisma. His piety helps to conjure


the image of the Mahdi, but his “return” is even more important: he has come back from somewhere, and he speaks of the past as if it is something missing from the present, which he can return. His charisma is not a political or personal charisma. It is the charisma, the seduction, of history.

PROPHECY

Those who criticize me for being a reformist do not seem to understand that ever since Adam arrived on Earth, God has been sending prophets to renew and revive religious thought and practice.

–Hassan al-Turabi

In Sudan, the Muslim Brotherhood emerged in 1949 as the Islamic Charter Front (ICF), out of Muslim student groups that had been organizing in the universities in the 1940’s. Its members were urban and highly educated. Unlike the Brotherhood in Egypt, the Sudanese branch was built around elite support and drew little membership from the lower classes or rural poor. In 1964, the Dean of the Law School at the University of Khartoum was elected Secretary General of the Islamic Charter Front, a position that he has held ever since. The new Secretary, Hassan al-Turabi, had recently returned from studies at the University of London and the Sorbonne in Paris, where he had been active in Muslim student organizing. He has become, since 1964, heir of the Islamist philosophical tradition. He has also been the Sudanese state ideologue or, as the 9/11 Commission Report has phrased it, “Sudan’s longtime hard-line

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ideological leader.\textsuperscript{130} He has thrived by mixing the historical Islamism of shari’a with adaptive philosophical interpretation, creating an Islamism in Sudan that is broadly adaptive to contemporary political necessity. He has focused on drafting Sudan an Islamic constitution and on instituting shari’a. He has also drawn heavily from the tradition of Islamic jurisprudence and rhetoric that is indigenous to Sudan and embedded in the country’s history.

Hassan al-Turabi is Sudan’s philosopher-king, and though he has not often had explicit political power or office, he has driven the politics of the country for over 40 years. In a speech he gave in London in 1992, Turabi articulated his principles and goals, saying:

The historical test for Muslims has always been to recover after every set-back, seeking through the renewal of faith (iman), the renewal of thought (ijtihad) and the resurgence of action (jihad) to salvage religion from temporal containment and ensure its progressive development, relevance and continuity in history.\textsuperscript{131} He has been central to Sudan's project of becoming an Islamist clearinghouse, and he has lent charisma and talent to the Islamist cause. Indeed, "in Sudan's contemporary history, it is probably true to say that al-Turabi is the most high-profile and important political and religious figure, second only to Mohamed Ahmed al-Mahdi, leader and founder of the Mahdiyyah uprising and state of the late nineteenth century."\textsuperscript{132} Through his creation of an Islamist persona, Turabi has come to embody to me the intellectual and charismatic ideologue -- not a populist like Khomeini, but with more of an other-worldly, almost divine politics. His intellectual skills are nearly unparalleled, and he seems to craft Sudanese life with the hand of predestination. He is not the people's leader, yet the people revere him. His persona is one of divinity: he has attached himself to the Mahdist family by marrying "Wisal al-Mahdi, Sadiq al-Mahdi's sister and daughter of a

prominent member of the Mahdi family, the center of leadership of the Ansar sect.”

And when he speaks, he talks about history and Islam in such a way as to make Sudan and Iran's revolutions seem like simple manifestations of God's will. His own role -- as Prophet and leader -- is equally God-given.

In interviews with Western journalists, Turabi is speaking directly to me, easing my fears about Islamic extremism, talking rationally and calmly. He is a Prophet for me, explicating this political moment with all the authority of a divine messenger. Within his words, I imagine we are circling the singularity of the revolution, which is dreamt of not as a outburst of violence, but the gentle mysterious confluence of history and divinity.

"The radicals are infatuated with certain images of Islamic history and have decided that they are the be-all and end-all of reform and renewal. They are gripped revolution and rebellion, but human history does not progress through revolution alone. Revolutions happen when change and freedom of expression are totally suppressed, and the old powers, with their political and economic interests and traditions, encroach upon them. It happens that pressure builds up underneath the surface until the old is no longer able to sustain it and revolutions explode. The radicals believe that this is the only way to progress in human history. However, religion is very clear on this point. When you first meet other people, you greet them. You begin by putting your case and appealing to the other side; if they invite you first you respond, you exchange views,

133 Ibid. 3.

enter into peaceful constructive dialogue. Religion, clearly, is based on belief and trust in God and on honesty, rather than force.

This is the proper Islamic approach, no matter that some may say that you ought to ignore the other side, even if he is willing to listen, and meet him by force. Most of these radicals are in fact isolated and live on the periphery of society, unable to influence the mainstream of life today. If you look closely into their ideas, you find that they are not really revolutionaries or shakers of history. Most of them are in fact playing from a distance with jargon and revolutionary slogans in some journals and books; but that truth is that revolution is not jargon, it is not slogans, it is in its true sense the making of life and history. You cannot make history just by playing with slogans.”

Turabi’s revolution is a revolution without guilt or blood. Like the Sudanese revolution itself, it occurs without visuals, as part of an invisible current of history and predestination. The revolution, rather than representing a break or an outburst, is natural part of the flow of life and history – and is not created, is not the object of intentionality, is not incited with slogans and propaganda. Seeking the cause of such a revolution would be to entirely misunderstand it.

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HISTORY

What made it possible for the Islamic movement in the Sudan to grow rapidly was the fact that it had a sense of its own history. Once one has a good understanding of one's history, the natural outcome will be revival. The Islamic movement in Sudan is very much aware of its own history. It might in its early days have assumed the form of the Egyptian experience, which in

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turn had emulated an earlier model of Islamic life. Within a short time, however, the movement developed a marked self-awareness, positioning itself accurately within its own specific place and time parameters. It began to match its stances and forms to the developing religious needs of time and place. It embarked on a renewal of its constitutional forms.

When I look at the history of Sudan, I do not stop at personalities, to praise some and condemn others. We have to be fair to everyone and give due credit to all, even to those whom we do not like, and give due criticism even to those to whom we feel most attached. As Muslim historians, we have to be fair and honest. We should not study Marxism with emotions of love or hatred. What we can say is that capitalism took Europe out of feudal oppression into another kind of oppression, colonialism. Capitalism also led to the suppression of workers, the weak and the needy in Europe itself, and this created a feeling of tyranny and caused people to search for social justice elsewhere. Thus the way was paved for Marx, Engels, Lenin and other Marxist pioneers to offer new answers, solutions and theories for combating social oppression. I do not interpret history through individuals. God's order is vast, and millions of people have come and gone over thousands of years of history, whose names we do not even know and whom history does not mention at all.

It is not an insignificant landmark in the history of Islam that the Sudan, with such meager resources would become a country where a full and serious Islamic experiment could be implemented. But God knows best where to put His trust; He brings out the living from the dead! Indeed, Islam itself emerged in an illiterate, humble, poor and fragmented society; such historic miracles are proof of the veracity of Islam.”

Even to use the term “history” is to misunderstand the kind of forces at work in the revolution. History contains the implication of a linearity, or a causality, from which there is a
clearly derivable chain of events. Rather, the history that is human is a history of mystery, of individuals, of unknowns and lacks. I do not imagine a God at work, like Turabi, but I love his idea of 'historical miracles.' History is then a documentation of the mixed-up, the unforeseen and the miraculous.

"The triumph of individuals is not as important as the triumph of ideas. What draws me, for example, to Omar Bin Abdulaziz or the early pioneers of Islam? Are they a part of my father's or my family's ancestry? No, it is the kinship of ideas that unites me with them. I have repeatedly called on Sudanese political leaders and invited them to work together under the banner of Islam, regardless of who rules. I am thankful to God that all my dreams have been fulfilled, without my being directly involved. People in the West do not believe this, nor do those who see everything in our country through personalities. The situation in the Sudan, therefore, is not dependent on individuals and cannot be understood from personality or conspiracy theories. If Sudan's fate is to turn away from Islam, then I, and President Omar al-Bashir and all those with us will fall and give way to someone else. What is happening in the Sudan does not depend on al-Turabi or al-Bashir or anyone else. It is part of the dynamic of History, and we are mere symbols in this process.

It was not the Muslims who made Muhammad well known in Arabia, because they were helpless and lacked the means of wealth and freedom to do so. It was his detractors who carried his name all over Arabia and attracted people to his ideas. They branded him a sorcerer and a

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poet, and so everyone who visited Mecca wanted to hear what this man had to say. [...] Muhammad's opponents were his best promoters. Today, the West's negative propaganda against Sudan has made it the focus of attention for many people in the Muslim World who had never even heard of it before, or had any serious interest in Islam. Many ask: what is it that intimidates the West? What is it that intimidates the supposedly most powerful superpower on the globe? It can only serve [my] objective of spreading Islam and taking it to wider audiences. Even though they might use headlines such as "The Dark Pope," "The King of World Terrorism," and "The Dangerous Paymaster," it would not bother [me].”

For Turabi, individuals are not agents of action, but rather are part of an a-historical play that is being performed according to a logic of its own. The idea of the Mahdi, though it contains the notion of a messianic individual, and therefore sets me up to believe in the charisma of the political leadership, is not about the Mahdi. His role is embedded in a logic of functionalism, where action flows through him – God’s desire to set righteousness up, and then to judge the faithful – but he does not, in any meaningful way, act.
[The nation] regains its security in customs so old and therefore sacred that authority fears to combat them. This is why a gradual rebirth of old customs, beliefs and symbols occurs under the lid of every dictatorship -- in opposition to, against the will of the dictatorship. The old acquires a new sense, a new and provocative meaning.\textsuperscript{137}

-Ryszard Kapuscinski

As I have tried to signify throughout the chapters, the separation between books, experiences and imagination is an artificial one. I cannot read without bringing to bear the work of experience, and reading creates a poly-imagined world. Things I had read previously have shaped my experiences, and those experiences have been re-imagined in memory. And the creations of my imagination – the conclusions, visions and arguments of this work – have been a complex of history, learning, events and stories.

I see the idea of the Mahdi behind and within both the Iranian and the Sudanese revolutions. It is there in subtle ways. It is presented in the notions of charisma and prophecy that accompanied the revolutions. The experiences of the revolutions have reflected it. And it has created the conditions for the extended life of the Islamic Republic, and the National Islamic Front.

But for me, the idea of the Mahdi is allegorical, even as it is literally evoked and performed on the ground. I am drawn to the Mahdi as a source because it represents the anti-historical, divine and unknowable nature of the revolutions themselves. Where do the revolutions come from? We don’t know, and so the Mahdist mythology becomes as likely a source as any. The unexpected success of Khomeini and Turabi gives their power a divinity and a messianic

quality that is mirrored, reproduced and replayed in the idea of Mahdi. The argument is then not one of causality but one of mimesis and allegory. The power of the revolutions was latent all along in the powerful politics of an absent, divine leader who would be known by his links to the past, and by the righteousness that he would succeed in bringing to the world. Once the revolutions succeed, they cannot help but to evoke the Mahdi.

By now, it should be clear that I don’t know why the Sudanese and Iranian revolutions succeeded. Nor do I think that it is a point about which knowledge is possible. I hope, in lieu of that kind of knowledge, that we have reached a knowledge that is knowable – namely, a sense of how we come to think that we know things, and what this process means particularly in the case of Islam. I am equipped with a set of books, experiences and imaginative notions that leave me positioned at this point of knowledge: the Mahdi is an illuminating allegory for the revolutionary actions. I can claim nothing for this answer to the “why” question on the grounds of facticity.

But you see, I am not despairing. I am making the argument, with the consciousness of all its limited, random, personal and ridiculous historical roots. I am still, against acknowledging the silliness of my “knowledge” compared to a dream of real understanding, trying to make the motion. I am expending energy in the act of intellectual play, always with a dream of that knowledge which would be union, a dissolution of self, a breaking through. I am consciously emulating Dostoevsky’s underground man, that old friend:

Nature doesn’t ask your permission; it doesn’t care about your wishes, or whether you like its laws or not. You’re obliged to accept it as it is, and consequently its results as well. And so a wall is indeed a wall… etc. etc. My God, but what do I care about the laws of nature and arithmetic if for some reason these laws and two times two is four are not to my liking? To be sure, I won’t break through such a wall with my forehead if I really haven’t got the strength enough to do it, but neither will I be reconciled with it simply because I have a stone wall here and not got strength enough.138

I am here still trying to break through, still caught in the dream of understanding. I have performed this whole text to end, appropriately, by cycling back through the eternally recurring fantasy of knowledge. I understand how I’ve come to know what I know, and it leaves me with a roadmap of what I do not know and think is available. Like the lists and piles of books, this work has outlined the limits to approach and it begins the map of roads – roads not yet taken. The subjectivity of the other – the Sudanese, the Iranians – beckons still. Does it not romance you against your will, this dream of entering into the other, and making them known?

“...

I was born into a poor family, to a father whose loving care I did not have for more than nine years. Then I spent my childhood reminiscing about the stories which were told about him. These were stories of his facing up to injustice and tyranny, of his standing up against dictatorship and repression. Visible in his old and broken face were years of pain and suffering, of fighting against those who tyrannized him relentlessly. In our home, there was always a scarcity of bread, and the most beautiful music we ever heard was the sound of my father’s prayers. So long as he was alive, injustice did not dare to intrude through the small window of our humid room. When the music of his prayers stopped, I remained with my mother, four brothers and twenty-five years of suffering under tyranny, sorrow and anxiety. Throughout the reign of Muhammad Reza Shah the tyrant, which occupied all my life, I always searched for someone who, like my father, would stand up to tyranny and without fear fight with the landlord, slap the chief of police in the face, go to jail for having defended an old woman, and recite his prayers in a loud music. Suddenly, in the wake of the revolution, I heard the voice of a man [Khomeini] from the most noble city of Najaf. The voice was one thousand times louder than my
father’s. A man whose cry penetrated deep into the very existence of the deprived people. His words were each like a sacred sword coming down on the fake regime of the Shah. I realized that this is my expected savior who is coming from Najaf. He has arisen from the site of Ali’s grave, peace be upon him.…

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Appendix J: Bibliography


1247-52.


Mahmoud, Muhammad. “Sufism and Islamism in the Sudan.” African Islam and Islam in Africa:


Appendix II: Glossary

1001 Arabian Nights – Also known as The Book of One Thousand and One Nights. The book is framed as a collection of stories told to the Persian Shah Shahryar (who had begun the practice of executing his wives after discovering one’s infidelity) by his young wife Scheherazade, in order to forstall the King’s execution of her. Contains well-known tales like Sinbad the Sailor, Aladdin and Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves.

9/11 Commission Report – Issued on July 22, 2004, the Report detailed the events leading up to the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon. The report detailed al-Qaeda’s role in planning the attacks, and asserted that massive intelligence failures had allowed the attack to take place.

Abbasids – The second of the Sunni dynastical caliphates, based in Baghdad, which ruled from 750 until 1258, but whose power in the last 200 years of their rule was largely nominal.

Abu Bakr – Companion of the Prophet Muhammad, and the second Sunni caliph, from 632-634. He is regarded by Sunnis as one of the four rightly guided caliphs.

Ahl al-Bayt – Means the People of the House, and refers to the descendents and household of Muhammad.

Akhbari School – The school of clerical thought in Shi’a Iran that gives a more limited role to religious leaders, and do not require that the faithful have a leader who they imitate in religious and judicial issues.

Aladdin – Produced by Disney in 1992, Aladdin is an animated feature film set in a fictional Middle Eastern city named Agrabah. Aladdin, the title character, finds a genie, and uses his three wishes to become a prince and marry Jasmine, the princess he has his heart set on.

Alawites – A sect of Shi’a Islam found primarily in Syria who focus on the righteous, even God-like, nature of Ali, the Prophet’s son-in-law.

Ali Osman Taha – Currently the second vice president of Sudan, Taha is credited with being the architect of Sudan’s policy toward the rebel groups and civilian population of Darfur. He was also instrumental in creating the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. He has been vice president since 1998.

Allahu Akbar – Phrase known in Arabic as the Takbir, the common translation is “God is great” or “God is the greatest.” The phrase is written on the Iranian flag.

Al-Qa’im – Another name for the Mahdi, which refers to he who will rise, or he who will return, used in the Shi’a lexicon.

Al-Qaeda – A transnational Islamist organization focused on the destruction of American interests and civilians, founded by the wealthy Saudi national, Osama bin Laden. Has taken responsibility for the 9/11 attacks, as well as many other terroristic events.
Amir – Arabic for a secular leader in an Islamic community, Typically applied to princes or military commanders.

Ansar – The military force established by Muhammad Ahmed in order to over throw the Turkiyyah in Sudan. At their height, the Ansar numbered upwards of 50,000 men. After the overthrow of the Mahdi, the remnants of the Ansar coalesced into the Umma political party.

Aswan – A city in Egypt near the Sudanese border than occupies a crucial position along the Nile River. The site of the Baqt Treaty, as well as early Nubian settlements. In the 19th and 20th century, Aswan assumed a newly prominent role as the location of the Aswan High Dam, which created a massive irrigation system at the instigation of the British, and which prompted British interest in stabilizing Sudanese politics in the late 19th century.

Ayatollah – A title of high rank among the Shi’a religious clerics in Iran, which signifies a high level of knowledge in jurisprudence, ethics, philosophy and textual exegesis

Baqt Treaty – A treaty between the Nubia Kingdom of Makuria and the Muslim rulers of newly conquered Egypt. It was the only peace treaty the Muslim armies recognized, and is by some metrics the longest-lasting treaty in history.

Battle of Algiers – An Italian film about the French occupation of Algeria and its capital, Algiers from 1954-1962 during the Algerian War of Independence. The film, in black and white, was used as a training film for US army forces during the invasion of Iraq in the Second Gulf War.

Battle of Karbala – Took place in Karbala, Iraq in 680 between the forces of Yazid, the Sunni caliph candidate, and Husayn, the Shi’a candidate and grandson of the Prophet. Husayn and his companions were brutally treated and massacred by Yazid, and this slaughter is re-enacted each year by the Shi’a community in the Ashura passion plays.

Caliph – The Arabic term for a head of state, and generally used for the head of the entire Islamic umma. The first four successors to Muhammad were referred to as the rightly guided caliphs.

Col. Jaafar Nimieri – President of Sudan from 1971 to 1985 who exercised a dictatorial control over the country, first leaning towards Marxism, and leaning toward Islamist policies. Was the first to institute shari’a in Sudan.

Comprehensive Da’wa – A program instituted in Southern Sudan during the early 1990’s for the conversion of non-Muslim Sudanese. Involved missionary work, education, welfare and military training.
Darfur – The far western province of Sudan which since 2003 has been the site of a bloody civil conflict between government backed militias and local rebel groups who are pushing for greater shares of government power and resources.

Day of Judgment and Day of Resurrection – Known as Qiyamah in Arabic, this is the day on which all people (Muslim and non-Muslim) will be held accountable for their deed by God. The 75th Sura is particularly concerned with it, though the tribulations of the day are detailed throughout the Qur’an and hadith.

(DUP) Democratic Unionist Party – One of two main political parties in Sudan, the DUP is the political arm of the Khatmiyya Sufi Brotherhood, which opposed the Ansar and the Mahdi’s Umma Party.

Druze – A Semitic community based in the Middle East who are influenced by Shi’a Islam as well as Greek philosophy and other traditions. Druze communities are located primarily in the mountains of south-central Lebanon, with smaller enclaves in Syria, Israel and Jordan. They believe that the Fatimid caliph al-Hakim went into occultation in the 10th century, and will return as al-Mahdi.

Ezan – The Islamic call to prayer voiced over loudspeakers or by a muezzin from the minarets of a mosque five times a day.

Faqir – A Sufi holy man, particularly one who performs feats of ascetic endurance or apparent magic.

Fatima – The daughter of Muhammad, and only surviving child of the Prophet who had children. Married to Ali, and the mother of Husayn and Hassan, the 3rd and 2nd Shi’a Imams. Veneration by both Sunni and Shi’a traditions.

Fatwa – An opinion issued by a scholar capable of issuing decrees on shari’a that is usually issued to clear up a legal or religious argument.

Funj Kingdom – A kingdom in Sudan from the 16th to the 19th century which represented the first national government of the area that is today Sudan, and whose leaders were Muslim.

Gen. Omar al-Bashir – The leader of the 1989 Sudanese revolution, and President of the new government, a position which he continues to hold today.

General Charles Gordon – Known also as Chinese Gordon or Gordon of Khartoum, Gordon was a British army officer and administrator who was killed in 1885 by the Ansar of the Mahdi during an attempted evacuation of Khartoum and the Southern Nile.
**Hadith** – The collected sayings and deeds of the Prophet (and the close members of his household). Hadith were first collected in the centuries after Muhammad’s death, and so there are various collections created by different individuals, which are compared against each other to check authenticity. Each hadith is also traced through its line of oral transmission (isnad) back to the person who originally witnessed it.

**Hassan al-Turabi** – Long the leader of Islamist politics in Sudan, Turabi emerged as the behind-the-scenes leader of the 1989 Islamist coup, and has held various government posts, including Speaker of the Assembly, under the new regime.

**Hezbollah** – Hezbollah, which means Party of God, refers to both the paramilitary groups active during the early Iranian Revolution, as well as the political party and militia active in Lebanon with the backing of the Iranian government.

**Hijab** – The Arabic word for “cover,” hijab today generally refers to the Islamic practice of veiling: particularly the practice by women of covering the head and wearing modest clothing. In classical Arabic, the term has a broader meaning of modesty, privacy or morality.

**Hudud** – A term in Islamic legal discourse for the fixed punishments ascribed by God in the Qur’an for certain crimes, including drinking alcohol, theft, robbery and illegal sexual intercourse. Punishments include flogging, crucifixion, amputation of hands and feet and other types of capital punishment.

**Husayn** – The grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, brother of the second Imam, Husayn, and the son of Fatima. He is viewed as the third Shi’a Imam. He was killed at the Battle of Karbala in Iraq, and the anniversary of his death, known as Ashura, is celebrated by Shi’a communities with passion plays and remembrance. The Twelve Imams descend through Husayn’s lineage.

**Hassan** – The other grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, and son of Fatima. He is regarded as the second Shi’a Imam, and was the brother of Husayn.

**Ijtihad** – A process in Islamic law of making legal decisions based on an independent analysis of legal sources, the Qur’an and the Sunna – the opposite of ijtihad is taqlid (imitation). Typically, only highly qualified scholars of Islamic law are recognized as qualified to perform ijtihad, and are known as mujtahidis.

**Imam** – An Islamic term for religious leader or prayer leader; in Shi’a Islam, a term reserved exclusively for the Twelve Imams descending from the line of the Prophet Muhammad. Applied to Khomeini during the Islamic Revolution.

**Imam Mahdi** – Also known as the Hidden Imam, the Twelfth Imam, al-Mahdi or al-Qa’im al-Mahdi. The twelfth Shi’a Imam, currently in hiding, who is also the expected messiah who will redeem the people.
**Iranian Constitution (1906)** – The Iranian Constitution was created under pressure from clerics and intellectuals, who pushed the faltering Qajar Dynasty to cede powers to a constitutive assembly, and to allow the clerics to approve legislation based on Islamic law.

**Iranian Constitution (1979)** – Written by supporters of Ayatollah Khomeini, and approved in a national referendum by 98% of voters, the 1979 constitution lays out the precepts of the Islamic Republic, emphasizing the role of the guardianship of the jurists (See Vali-ye Faqih).

**Iranian Society of Combatant Clergy** – Also known as the Iranian Combatant Clergy Association, the ISCC is a conservative political party in Iran. It was founded in 1977 by a group of clerics intent on using culture to overthrow the Shah. The current Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei was a founding member.

**Islamic calligraphy** – Since Islam forbids the use of images as religious iconography, calligraphy, and particularly calligraphic renderings of the Qur’an, have a central artistic role in Islamic culture.

**ICF (Islamic Charter Front)** – Founded by Hassan al-Turabi in the 1970’s out of older iterations of Islamist organizations in Sudan, including the Muslim Brotherhood.

**Islamic jurisprudence, schools of** – There are four schools of thought about law in Sunni Islam: Maliki, Hanafi, Shafi’I and Hanbali. In Shi’a Islam, the school of law is Jafari.

**Islamism** – Term in employ for a politics strongly influenced by Islam; also used to characterize the ideology of Islamic government, and Islamic theories of social and legal order.

**Ismaili** – The second largest sub-group of Shi’a Islam, the Ismailis accept the legitimacy of Fatima’s line, but diverge from Twelvers over the issue of succession around the Fifth Imam. There are many sub-groups of Ismaili Muslims.

**Marxism** – Social economic theory propounded by Karl Marx which raises the problems of capitalism: exploitation, alienation, commodification. Used in the mid-20th century by several secular Arab leaders and translated into an application for Arab society known as Arab Socialism.

**Mecca, Saudi Arabia** – The holiest sight in Islam, and the focus of the Hajj Pilgrimage, which is enjoined on Muslims to complete at least once in their lifetime. The birthplace of the Prophet Muhammad, and sight of the first revelations.

**Medina, Saudi Arabia** – After the Prophet’s rejection by the Meccan community, he emigrated to Medina, and his prophecy was accepted. The conquest of Mecca took place from Medina after the Prophet had been accepted there.
Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi – The last Shah of Iran, deposed by the Islamic revolution in 1979. Responsible for ambitious and arguably failed policies of modernization and renowned for the opulence of his court.

Mosque – A place of worship and prayer for Muslim faithful, comparable to the Christian church or Jewish synagogue. Most have domes, prayer halls and minarets (from which people are called to prayer by the ezan).

Muhammad Abduh – Egyptian jurist and thinker, author of The Theology of Unity. Advocated a return to ijtihad in order to restore Islam for the modern world.

Muhammad Ahmed – Sufi faqir who claimed the title of Mahdi in Sudan, and led the process of ejecting the Turkiyyah in the early 1880’s. He claimed to be the awaited messiah, and raised an army known as the Ansar who numbered over 50,000 at their height.

Mujahideen – The general term for Muslims fighting in a holy war or struggle.

Muslim Brotherhood – Founded in Egypt in 1928 by Hassan al-Banna as a social and religious group intent on reviving the Islamic world. Ancillary chapters have been formed in Arab countries across the Middle East, and including a chapter in Sudan.

NIF (National Islamic Front) – A Sudanese political party that control the current government, and has pushed for shari’a and Islamic government. Founded by Hassan al-Turabi out of earlier Islamist political groups in 1989 as the Islamist came to power in Sudan.

Nikki Keddie – A retired American professor from UCLA who is an expert on Iranian politics, women’s studies and history. Has edited and published extensively over a 35 year academic career.

Nubia – The region south of Egypt along the Nile that was a region of independent city-states from ancient times until about 1300 AD. Nubian cultural and linguistic distinctions still exist in present day Sudan.

Occultation, Short – From 878 until 940, the Twelfth Imam was in hiding but was in regular contact with a series of appointed agents, or wakils.

Occultation, Long – Beginning in 940, the Twelfth Imam entered into the long occultation during which there is no agent, and no regular contact with the Hidden Imam.

Omdurman – Currently the largest city in Sudan with a population of about 1.9 million people. The city lies on the opposite bank of the Nile from Sudan’s capital, Khartoum. During the 1880’s and 1890’s, Omdurman was the capital of the Mahdi’s government.
Orientalism – The study of Middle Eastern, Persian and North African cultures and languages, the term has come to be associated with a book of the same title by Edward Said. For Said, Orientalism implied backward and prejudicial views of the people and cultures being studied.

Osama bin Laden – A wealthy Saudi Arabian national who is the founding member of the al-Qaeda terrorist network. He has been indicted by the US for the embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania, and has claimed responsibility for the 9/11 attacks against the US.

Ottoman Empire – A Turkish state which controlled or administered large swaths of the Levant, Mesopotamia and North Africa from 1299 until the final disintegration in 1922. Controlled the Sudan through Egyptian administrators in the 19th century.

PAIC (Pan Arab and Islamic Conference) – An international conference of Islamists and “terroristic” organizations hosted by Hassan al-Turabi and the Sudanese government in 1993 in Khartoum.

Pasha Muhammad Ali – An Ottoman viceroy of Egypt who is often cited as the founder of modern Egypt. He also waged a war south-ward to Sudan, which he brought under Ottoman control in 1821.

PDF (Popular Defense Front) – The conscripted popular militia in Northern Sudan in the early 1990’s used to wage a civil war against the Southern Sudanese armies.

Prophet Muhammad – The prophet of Islam, who received the Qur’an from the angel Gabriel as God’s final communication to the faithful on Earth. Muhammad went on to convert the Arabian cities of Mecca and Medina, and begin the process of conquering surrounding lands for Islam. Born in 570, died in 632.

Qajar Dynasty – The ruling dynasty of Iran from 1781 until 1925, when Reza Muhammad Pahlavi overthrew the last Qajari Shah. The 1906 Constitutional Revolution seriously shook the Qajar Dynasty, and foreshadowed its downfall.

Qom, Iran – City in Iran that is the center of the Shi’a clerical establishment. Served as the center of Khomeini’s government following his return to Iran.

Qur’an – The holy book of Islam, dictated to the Prophet Muhammad by the angel Gabriel in Arabic over a 23-year period. The book was originally orally transmitted, and was only written down under Muhammad’s successor, Abu Bakr.

Rashid Rida – A Syrian intellectual born in 1865 who focused on reviving Muslim culture in the face of Western imperialism and secularization of Muslim societies. He blamed Sufis as well as blind imitation of the past for many problems, and called for modern ijtihad.
**RCC (Revolutionary Command Council for National Salvation)** – The governing body established in 1989 after the military coup in order to supervise Sudan. It was established by Gen. Omar al-Bashir, and included many military officials with Islamist leanings.

**Revolutionary Guard (Iran)** – The popular name for the Army of the Guardians of the Islamic Revolution, which is the largest armed force in the Islamic Republic of Iran. It is separate from the regular army and security services, though it has a parallel corps of soldiers, navy, air force, intelligence and special forces.

**Ruhollah Khomeini** – The popular leader of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, and a grand ayatollah, Khomeini became the Supreme Leader of Iran in 1979, a position he retained until his death in 1989. His thought is noted for his development of the idea of vali-ye faqih, the “guardianship of the jurists.”


**Safavid Dynasty** – A Shi’ite dynasty in Iran that ruled from 1502 until 1722.

**Salman Rushdie** – An Anglo-Indian novelist who is perhaps most famous for his fourth novel, The Satanic Verses, which provoked Ayatollah Khomeini to issue a fatwa calling for his assassination.

**Samarra, Iraq** – A city in Iraq which is home to the Al-Askari Mosque. This mosque contains the mausoleums of the 10th and 11th Shi’a Imams, as well as the Gate and Well of Occultation, where the Twelfth Imam is said to have vanished. In 2006, the golden dome of the mosque was destroyed by sectarian violence.

**SAVAK** – From 1957-1979, the main security services under the Shah in Iran. Stands for Sazeman-e Ettelaat va Amniyat-e Keshvar in Persian, which roughly translates to the Organization for Intelligence and National Security. Notorious for their use of torture, secret detainment and even summary execution.

**Seven Sleepers** – The legend of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus is a tale of sleepers in a cave who awake centuries after they have gone to sleep. The sleepers were viewed as saints in Christianity, best known through the narrative of their slumber in The Golden Legend, and as divinely blessed in the Qur’an (Sura 18:9-26).

**Sevener** – A branch of Shi’a Islam where only the first seven Shi’a Imams are acknowledged as legitimate. They are a sub-group of the Ismailis who do not recognize the authority of the Egyptian Fatimid Caliphate

**Shari’a** – The body of Islamic law which addresses issues of politics, sexuality, marriage, economics and religious practice derived from the Qur’an, hadith and jurisprudential interpretation.
**Shi’a Islam** – The second largest Islamic denomination, which follows the sunna of Muhammad, but believes that authority and leadership in the Umma can only descend through the Prophet’s daughter Fatima and son-in-law Ali. There are many sects of Shi’ism.

**Sufism** – A more mystical or emotive tradition within Islam that encompasses a wide range of beliefs and variant traditions. Turuq are associated with Shi’ism or Sunni Islam, as well as with specific geographic areas. In general, however, Sufism is associated with charismatic individual ascetics who are focused on turning their hearts to God.

**Sunna** – The way or example of the Prophet, known from the hadith of what Muhammad did or said during his 23 years as a Prophet.

**Sunni Islam** – The largest denomination of Islam, which follows the sunna of Muhammad, and recognizes the authority of the Caliphate of Abu Bakr rather than the authority of Fatima and Ali’s line.

**Sura** – The commonly used term for “chapters” of the Qur’an. There are 114 suras in the Qur’an, and they are ordered roughly according to their length.

**Teheran** – The capital city of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The metropolitan area of Teheran has over 12.6 million inhabitants.

**Timothy McVeigh** – Born 1968 and executed on April 19th, 1995 for his role in the bombing of the Oklahoma City federal building. The bombing killed 168 people, and remains the deadliest incident of domestic terrorism in U.S. history.

**Turkiyyah** – The rule of Ottoman Egypt over Sudan during the 19th century which was marked by a heavy tax burden as well as the taking of Sudanese military slaves.

**Turuq** – Means ‘way’ or ‘path.’ Turuq are schools of Sufi Islam. Each has a Guide who leads the school, as well as individually developed theological and legal ideas.

**Twelfth Imam** – The Twelfth Shi’a Imam, Muhammad al-Mahdi, is descended from the Prophet, and is said to have gone into occultation in 874 AD, where he is awaiting the call from God to emerge as the Mahdi.

**U.S. State Dept. list of State Sponsors of Terrorism** – A list compiled annually by the U.S. Department of State of countries who support or engage in what the U.S. sees as terroristic activity.

**Ulema** – Refers to the educated scholars of Islam who are experts in various theological subfields including law, Qur’anic exegesis and philosophy. Broadly used in the Muslim world to describe a range of scholars including muftis, qadi, mullahs or imams (in the Sunni sense of the label).
**Umayyads** – The first great dynasty of the Muslim caliphate, based in Damascus, Syria and founded by Umayya ibn Abd Shams. The caliphate lasted from 661 to 750 AD.

**Ummah** – The Arabic word for community or nation. Generally refers to the community of believers or the broad Islamic community.

**Usuli School** – A faction of Shi’a clerics in the 19th century who supported the idea of *ijtihad*, or modern interpretation, in Islamic jurisprudence. Beyond that, the Usuli school also supported the idea that the faithful needed to follow a living cleric who would do the interpretation.

**Vali-ye Faqih** – The guardian jurist; in Iran, the Supreme Leader. Is based on the idea of the guardianship of the Islamic Jurists, which is an idea supported by Ayatollah Khomeini that asserts that Islam gives jurists custodianship over the community of the faithful, including political custodianship.

**Wahhabism** – An Islamic movement originating in Saudi Arabia named after Muhammad ibn Wahhab (1703-1792) which focuses on returning to the origins of the Prophet’s time, and modeling society on 7th century Mecca and Medina. Today, the movement is known more commonly as “salafism.”

**Wakil** – The Arabic term for the four agents of the Hidden Imam who communicated with Imam Mahdi during the Short Occultation and relayed the Imam’s words to the community.

**Yazid** – The Sunni claimant to the Caliphate who killed Husayn at the Battle of Karbala. The US, and the Shah, were frequently compared to Yazid during the Islamic Revolution.

**Zaidiyyah** – Also known as Fivers in the West, this sect of Shi’a Islam. They recognize the first four conventional Shi’a Imams, but name Zayd ibn Ali as the fifth Imam instead of his brother Muhammad al-Baqir.

**Zakat** – The Islamic pillar of faith that enjoins Muslims to give alms and charity, usually around 2.5% of their wealth.