ISLAMIC LIBERATION THEOLOGY

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"I don't want learning, or dignity, or respectability. I want this music and this dawn and the warmth of your cheek against mine." - Rumi

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INTRODUCTION

A subcategory within the modern trend of liberal Islam, Islamic liberation theology is influenced by the Christian liberation theology of Gustavo Gutiérrez and has been a focus of a small group of Muslim scholars in countries with non-Muslim majorities. It is born out of the need to address social and economic injustice in certain contexts and supports creating political environments where justice for all people is created and maintained. In their struggle to end oppression, Muslims use the Qur'an to reflect on their actions and guide them in God's way. Islamic liberation theology is a relatively unknown subject within the scholarship of liberation theology, and to a much greater extent is lost within the discourse of Islamic Studies as a whole. This thesis hopes to bring attention to the work of Islamic liberation theologians, Asghar Ali Engineer, Farid Esack, and Hamid Dabashi, who explicitly label their work "Islamic liberation theology".

Part of the goal will be to determine why Islamic liberation theology is a marginal study and why a comparable liberation theology has not yet been developed in the contemporary Middle East, where a large number of Muslim majority countries are located. So far, the major works on Islamic liberation theology seem to come out of non-Muslim majority countries, specifically India and South Africa. In South Africa, Farid Esack's theology of liberation is used to justify the fight against the system of apartheid, and stems from liberal values, as supported through a contextual reading of the Qur'an. In India, Asghar Ali Engineer develops a theology of liberation in response to ethnic and communal violence created by the caste system and the political struggle between Hindus and Muslims. Dabashi's liberation theology does not lie within the borders of a country,

but applies to the global community of which Muslims represent just a part of the whole. He responds to the oppression perpetrated throughout the world by the United States in its attempt to seize control of global capital through violent means.

This thesis will argue that in the modern context of a non-Muslim majority in which Muslims are subject to oppression due to their marginal status as a religious other, the conditions are right for the development of an Islamic liberation theology. However, with a religious ideology that incorporates modern values of equality and human rights, it seems unlikely that it would not also develop within situations of oppression in Muslim majority countries, especially because of its reliance on Islam. Therefore, an alternative Islamic political perspective with a similar religious ideology is sought out within a Muslim majority context. In this work, the alternative explored is post-Islamism.

Post-Islamism, as defined by Asef Bayat, originates from Islamism, but at the same time constitutes a break from it. It is a post-modern political trend within Muslim majority countries that distances itself from the totalitarian nature of Islamism and incorporates liberal values into its ideology while still emphasizing Islam as a reference. These liberal values are shared by Islamic liberation theologians, who also make it a point to distance themselves from the Islamist ideology and see liberal values as compatible with Islam based on contextual readings of the Islamic scriptures. For this commonality, it would seem that post-Islamism serves as Islamic liberation theology's equivalent in the Middle East.

However, despite similar religiously charged ideologies, there are major differences between the two that make a comparison seem difficult. These differences can be explained by the influence of historical context. Despite sharing similar

ideologies, how they act upon their beliefs depends on their motivation for action and the goals they have for their own societies. While they are both products of modernity, liberation theology grows from a point of marginalization within a non-Muslim majority, while post-Islamism is usually found with Muslim majority settings and grows from the tradition of Islamism that it seeks to overcome. This means that their religious ideologies are reactionary and are in turn shaped by the conditions to which they react. Therefore, despite its incorporation of widespread modern values, it can be argued that Islamic liberation theology is only found in context of a non-Muslim majority because the right conditions exist for its development. Thus, this paper shall explain how a Muslim majority context fosters post-Islamism and how a non-Muslim majority context, specifically one where Muslims are marginalized, leads to Islamic liberation theology.

Because Islamic liberation theology and post-Islamism are particular expressions of the broader movement of modern "liberal Islam", the first chapter of this paper takes a look at the rise of liberal Islam as Charles Kurzman defines it. He explains how different trends of Islam in the 20th century came to be and how they were influenced by modernity, westernization, and mass education. While setting the scene that allowed for liberal Islam to come about, Kurzman also goes into the characteristics of liberal Islam and which values are widely supported by liberal Muslims. Incorporating Kurzman's work into this thesis will help gear the reader towards the general historic conditions under which Islamic liberation theology and post-Islamism came about. Because post-Islamists and the Islamic liberation theologians under analysis display awareness of what trends of Islam have come before them and where they fall in the scheme of scholarship

on Islam, it is important to include a chapter that describes liberal Islam and its development.

Chapters 2, 3, 4, and 5 provide an explanation of Islamic liberation theology that takes the time to explain difficult theological concepts and goes in-depth to describe what this relatively unfamiliar Islamic political theology looks like. Gustavo Gutiérrez's Christian liberation theology is the focus of chapter 2, because it is important to examine the precedent he set in the struggle for liberation in Latin America. His liberation theology opened the floodgates by spreading revolutionary ideas that challenged the role of religion in the world and argued that faith could be a strong force for change if used in the light of the struggle against oppression. As shall be explained in chapters 3 and 4, these ideas did not just apply to Christianity but motivated theologians like Farid Esack, Asghar Ali Engineer, and Hamid Dabashi to rethink Islam's role in the context of oppression. Self-aware of the inspiration they took from Gutiérrez, they borrow from his language and adapt the central tenets of Christian liberation theology to create an Islamic liberation theology, which fit their needs as Muslims who wanted to be rid of oppression and knew that religion had an important role to play in their struggle.

The chapters on Esack and Engineer provide an analysis of the shape that their Islamic liberation theologies take as a result of contextual influences. While Esack responds to apartheid in South Africa, which marginalized Muslims based on religion and race, Engineer's work deals with the caste system in India and the oppression and violence that Muslims experienced due to the interreligious conflict supported by religious elites.

Chapter 5 looks at Hamid Dabashi, who throws somewhat of a wrench into things. Because he labels what he does as "Islamic liberation theology in his book *Islamic Liberation Theology: Resisting the Empire*, and cites Gutiérrez as an inspiration, he must be discussed in this study. However as we shall see, he does not fit the model of Engineer and Esack. A deeper analysis of Dabashi's book *Islamic Liberation Theology* shows that although he diverges significantly from Engineer and Esack, he recognizes the force that liberation theology can be in the world. Furthermore, his ideas about this are influenced by and cannot be separated from the historical context with which he is concerned.

Chapter 6 introduces post-Islamism as defined by Asef Bayat and explains how it is characterized in terms of its break from the ideology of Islamism. By analyzing post-Islamism's relationship to the context in which it developed, the reason for this break becomes clearer, and we are able to understand the motivations for the change. Chapter 7 then conducts an analysis and comparison of post-Islamism and Islamic liberation theology and extrapolates on the arguments of this thesis based on the evidence of the preceding chapters.

CHAPTER 1: LIBERAL ISLAM

In his book *Liberal Islam*, Charles Kurzman compiles an anthology of authors and activists whose writings represent liberal manifestations of Islam. Although they may not necessarily identify as liberal, Kurzman brings these authors together because he believes they all deal with liberal themes, which, in the interest of the book, include ideas like democracy, human progress, and religious tolerance.[1] Kurzman himself wrote the introduction to the anthology, and in it provides a useful historical sketch of the range and common themes of these various liberal interpretations of Islam.

Farid Esack and Asghar Ali Engineer, two of the the liberation theologians I discuss, are both considered by Kurzman to be important liberal Muslim scholars. This places Islamic liberation theology within the broader trend of liberal Islam. Therefore, understanding the historical context of liberal Islam and the ideals of liberal Islamic scholars will be useful to the analysis of Islamic liberation theology.

KURZMAN'S HISTORY OF LIBERAL ISLAM

Kurzman begins by describing the characteristics of liberal Islam from its beginnings in the 18th century until the end of the 20th century. There are three traditions of socio-religious interpretation that provide insight into the recent history of Islamic discourse, with the caveat that these traditions can take different forms and should not be considered homogenous within themselves. The first is "customary Islam", which is regional practice and customs such as saint reverence, holidays, and musical traditions, combined with the general practices that are common of Muslims throughout the world.

The next tradition is "revivalist Islam", which is fundamentalist in nature and critiques the customary tradition. In order to "purify" customary practice of Islam, which

was static and flawed because it was based on the interpretations of medieval religious authorities, revivalists believe in going back to the original sources of Islam (the Qur'an, *sunnah*, and *shari'a*). Practicing Islam in accordance with these sources, as interpreted by revivalist intellectuals, would ensure "correct" practice as God intended. Politically, they are critics of non-Islamic institutions, which they believe attempt to appropriate God's divine authority.[2]

The third tradition, "liberal Islam", came out of the revivalist movements of the 18th century. Like revivalists, liberals sought to be rid of un-Islamic practice by returning to the original sources of Islam, but instead of recreating the conditions of the past by eschewing modernity, they wanted to enjoy the fruits of modernity. They argue that Islam is compatible with western liberalism and modern ideals such as democracy, human rights, freedom of thought, and economic progress. The earliest Islamic liberals believed that Islam could be revived through new theological approaches, but they were more tolerant of customary practices than revivalists and realized that Islamic law needed to be adapted to contextual needs.[3]

Starting in the 19th century, Islamic liberals began to emphasize *ijtihad* (reason) over *taqlid* (authority). While *taqlid* stressed imitation of previous religious authorities and jurists, *ijtihad* allowed Islam to be interpreted according to the needs of modern Muslims. In the late 1800's, liberal reform movements were geared towards education and advocated that Muslims should study Islam for themselves in new ways, rather than relying on past traditional scholars of Islam to provide them with religious "truth". Most Islamic liberals at the time were intellectuals and wanted to refocus religious education and combine it with the study of Western disciplines such as natural and social science.

Revivalist intellectuals rejected this approach, and insisted on relying on themselves to dictate how lay Muslims should practice "true" Islam.

Islamic liberals also introduced liberal reform through various forms of journalism, spreading their work and ideas through newspapers and books. It wasn't until the beginning of the 20th century that these ideas led Islamic liberals to the conclusion that the opinions of the people should dictate public affairs. With the emergence of a new breed of liberal Muslim intellectuals, liberal Islam began to make political headway through the establishment of liberal organizations and constitutional movements. However, these advances were overshadowed by the growth of revivalist Islam and secular military might, and the emergence of secularist and nationalist ideologies among educated Muslims. Islamic liberals were forced to withdraw even more as powerful revivalists accused them of being allied with the interests of Western countries.[4]

Despite this setback and the continuing growth of revivalist Islam, liberal Islam has gained more attention since the 1970's and contemporary Islamic liberals of the late 20th century are rebuilding a liberalism that approaches modern themes more confidently and asserts the need for Islamic contributions to modern problems. Widespread education and literacy are allowing Muslims to engage with Islamic texts themselves, which has helped weaken the authority of religious schools and scholars and their monopoly over religious truth. In fact, many Islamic liberal scholars are now being trained secularly. There are renewed efforts to create and strengthen organizations that promote liberal ideas, and many of them now focus on fostering peace, coexistence, and interfaith solidarity.[5]

As well as advanced education, Kurzman has also attributed the re-emergence of liberal positions to an increase in international communication. The ideals of Western liberalism are more widespread, pervasive, and accessible than ever before, and one of the most important has been the ideal of freedom of thought. This has encouraged Muslims to express themselves and engage in debate, which allows for criticism and induces a healthier understanding of what "truth" is, especially in religious terms. Another factor in the rise of liberal Islam is the failure of Islamic regimes, which has led Muslims to explore alternate ideologies to fundamentalist Islamism.[6] This failure, and the rise of ideologies like post-Islamism, will be discussed at length throughout the course of this paper.

IDEALS OF LIBERAL MUSLIM SCHOLARS

Kurzman groups the positions of the liberal Muslim scholars into several overarching ideals that encompass their concerns: opposition to theocracy, the rights of non-Muslims, democracy, progress, and freedom of thought. As discussed above, how Muslim scholars approach these themes are influenced by historical context and their personal reading of the Qur'an.

The first ideal that Kurzman discusses is that liberal Muslim scholars reject theocracy and object to the strict implementation of *shari'ah*. This objection is not only rooted in textual analyses but is influenced by the collapse of Islamic regimes and western liberalist ideas of a secular state. It has become apparent over time to some scholars that in many cases a secular state, especially in the contemporary era, does not mean the absence of religion, but permits the protection of religion of all kinds. It avoids

the corruption of those who assume rule in the name of God and allows for religious coexistence.[7]

The support for religious coexistence among liberal Muslim scholars stems from the belief that non-Muslims should be given the same rights as Muslims because of their shared humanity. These scholars, especially those in non-Muslim majority countries (as shall be highlighted throughout the course of this paper) assert that the Qur'an advocates coexistence and peace with the religious other.[8] This goes hand in hand with support for democracy. Democracy is an ideal that is being embraced increasingly throughout the Muslim world, and many Islamic liberals have begun to claim that it is an Islamic ideal as much as it is Western, and may have even predated the rise of Western democracy and liberalism. Liberal Muslim scholars are more split on their approach to democracy than other ideals, and debate about the best form for it to take, but agree that it is the best way to ensure that the will of the people is being exercised.[9]

Progress is very important to liberal Muslims, as opposed to revivalists, who believe that Muslims should make every effort to recreate the "golden age" of Islam as it existed under the first Muslim community. Islamic liberals view modernity and change as positive elements and believe that part of Islam's power as a religion is that it is inherently adaptive. Kurzman states that those who study Islamic fundamentalists should not be fooled by their use of modern tools to achieve their goals: "Khomeini and other revivalists are pleased to borrow modern technologies from non-Muslims, but only as a means to the end of reviving the pure practice of Islam, as they interpret it. Liberals, by contrast, consider change itself... part of proper Islamic practice".[10]

The last ideal to be mentioned, although there are many more that liberal Islamic scholars support, is the freedom of thought, which is perhaps at the heart of liberal Islam. Liberals must defend this in order to justify their claims and the central idea that the general understanding of Islam should be decentralized. Some believe the Qur'an explicitly encourages rational thought and individual freedom, while some say that the religion is silent on certain aspects to allow room for the intellectual advancement of the Muslim community within its historical context. Others emphasize the importance of context and argue that religious interpretation is the product of historical conditions; the freedom of thought is an essential tool to reacting to such conditions and finding the relevance in religion. Many Muslim scholars incorporate all three arguments into their theologies.

CONCLUSION

Because Islamic liberation theology can be called a subcategory within liberal Islam, Kurzman's analysis of the rise of liberal Islam is useful for understanding the greater historical context in which Islamic liberation theology developed. Although the liberation theologians analyzed in the following chapters assert that their liberation theologies are first and foremost a reaction to oppression, they are part of the trend of Islamic liberals that has grown and adapted in response to modernity through education and engaging in international dialogue. They are aware of this reality and admit the influence it has on their work, and also know of the relationship they have with other trends of Islamic thought throughout the world, especially religious revivalism. Liberation theologians attempt to define themselves in relation to these trends while

establishing a theology that brings together Islamic and liberal values and responds to the needs of the marginalized and oppressed in light of these values.

       The next chapter will introduce Gustavo Gutiérrez's Christian liberation theology, which introduced a new way of doing theology and paved the way for an Islamic liberation theology to develop. The rise of a more liberal mindset among Muslim intellectuals worldwide, as described by Kurzman, allowed the concept of liberation theology and its liberal values to find greater resonance, if only among a marginal audience. The liberation theologians who are the focus of this paper were able to adapt features of Latin American Christian liberation theology to their own contexts, which resulted in the development of an *Islamic* liberation theology.

CHAPTER 2: INTRODUCING LIBERATION THEOLOGY

Liberation theology, as defined by the Peruvian theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez in the 1970's, is a theological movement born of efforts to abolish injustices and to build a freer and more humane society. Gutiérrez observed that Latin America was forced into a dependence on developed countries, whose dominance created social imbalances, political tensions, and poverty for many Latin Americans. The wealth gap was increasing, and many Latin Americans agitated for liberation from economic, political, and social dependence.

Within Catholic, and later Protestant, communities, political awareness and the desire for liberation from oppression led to a shift in theological thinking. Using their sacred texts, some Catholics realized that the conditions from which they suffered were incompatible with biblical teachings. Because these Latin American theologians believed religious values should be reflected in politics, religious movements took on a political dimension, and they began to engage in theology that critically reflected on the actions of mankind and guided them in an active struggle to remove forces of oppression and create a just society. This led the bishops, priests, and lay Catholics of Latin American countries like Peru, Nicaragua, Brazil, Cuba, and Mexico to support socialist revolutions against oppressive dictators[11].

Gutiérrez was influenced greatly by both the works of Marx and the Second Vatican Council. Like Marx, he believed that one must go beyond understanding the world and learn how to change it. The poverty he observed around him in Lima, Peru, was destructive and violated basic human rights, and it had to come to an end. However, poverty was embedded in the structures of society and thus required transformation

through active struggle rather than small acts of charity.[12] The need for this

transformation is highlighted not only by the lack of human dignity, but also by what

liberation theologians call God's preferential option for the poor. This does not mean that

God hates the rich, but that he loves *all* people and desires to see every human being

empowered. Therefore, the marginalized status of the poor is unacceptable and their

situation must be improved through empowerment and societal change.[13]

The Second Vatican Council from 1962-1965 initiated the decentralization of the

Catholic Church and became the hallmark of a new wave of ideas that asserted that the

Church consisted of the people of God rather than just the governing leadership. Mindsets

were shifting to believe that power resided in lay people and the leadership had the

responsibility to care for them and be involved in the affairs of the world. To Gutiérrez,

as a priest of the Latin American Catholic church, this meant that the Church is required

to defend the rights of the poor and help them in their struggle against injustice.[14]

In light of this commitment to serving others, theology becomes a tool and helps

to critically reflect on the action of the Church in the world. Formally, Gutiérrez defines

liberation theology as "critical reflection on praxis in the light of the word of God",[15]

which incorporates several dimensions. Praxis implies a never-ending cycle of reflection

and action, a critical process in which one is self-aware and hopes to arrive at total

wisdom by acting, evaluating the worth of that action, and making a change to conduct

oneself in a more effective way. The tool that aids this praxis for Christians is the word of

God, as manifest in the Bible and the example of Jesus Christ.[16] Because liberation

theology is critical reflection and follows the commitment to serving others, it is always a

"second act". Otherwise it will not be on the side of the poor and will instead justify their

marginalization.[17] It is important to stress the character of liberation theology as a "second act" because it always follows a reaction to contextual oppression and the realization that it must be overcome. This means liberation theology admits that its nature is determined by contextual circumstances. Faith may come as a form of preunderstanding before liberative praxis, but in situations of oppression, theology does not.

Robert MacAfee Brown, a professor of theology and ethics at Berkeley in California, has done extensive work on studying Gustavo Gutiérrez and liberation theology. He asserts that part of the character of liberation theology is that it opposes dominant theology and is facilitated and carried out in a completely new way. Dominant theology begins in the world of modernity and is developed from a position of privilege, thus it remains thought-oriented and is linked to those who enjoy wealth, power, and affluence. It concerns itself with the "other-worldly" and attempts (whether deliberately or unintentionally) to reinforce existing structures by affirming "the achievements of culture - individualism, rationalism, capitalism, and the bourgeois spirit." Liberation theology, on the other hand, begins in the world of the oppressed and is developed by those whose liberation it seeks to attain. It is action-oriented and focuses on the "this-worldly" by seeking to create political, social, and economic change. Therefore, it seeks to liberate the oppressed from any and all existing structures that dehumanize them. By nature, liberation theology threatens the dominant theology and demands its elimination.[18]

CONCLUSION

The concept of liberation theology is usually associated with the work of

Gutiérrez and other Christian theologians like him in Latin America, but recent

scholarship by notable Muslim theologians such as Farid Esack, Asghar Ali Engineer,

and Hamid Dabashi has effectively applied principles of Christian liberation theology to

Islam. Islamic liberation theology likewise challenges the status quo and systems of

oppression that Muslims face in specific contexts. Muslims also engage in a process of

"critical reflection on praxis in the light of the word of God", in which case the Qur'an,

rather than the Bible, is used as a guide to fight injustice. Islamic liberation theology

represents a way in which Islam is being practiced to create justice in various contexts.

As Robert McAfee Brown says:

> I stress... context lest the impression be given that liberation theology is an
> exclusively Latin American reality. Nothing could be further from the truth;
> liberation theology exists wherever there is oppression, and there are few parts of
> the globe, as a consequence, where movements for liberation are not this very day
> growing in size and intensity...[19]

As stated in the introduction as one of the objectives of this work, the following

chapters will devote great attention to Islamic liberation theology and the work of Asghar

Ali Engineer, Farid Esack, and Hamid Dabashi. Because Islamic liberation theology is

relatively unknown and can be considered a marginal topic, it is important to provide in-

depth analysis and pay special detail to the more difficult theological concepts that are

encompassed. The relationship of these concepts to historical context will be explored in

an effort to highlight that liberation theology is indeed a "second act", as Gutiérrez says.

CHAPTER 3: ASGHAR ALI ENGINEER

Engineer was born in India in 1939 and grew up with a background in Qur'anic commentary and Islamic jurisprudence, while also receiving a secular, modern education by earning a degree in engineering from the University of Indore. He was a member of the Dawoodi Bohra, a subsect of Shi'a Islam, and in 1972 he became the leader of the progressive Dawoodi Bohra movement, which primarily opposed the head-priests of the Bohra community. These head priests, or the orthodox *ulama*, were believed by Engineer and his followers to be exploitative and tyrannical in their rule. The *ulama* relied on feudalist theology, which legitimized them and kept them in power because it dictated that only religious leaders had the power to interpret the scriptures.[20]

Engineer observed in his work, *Islam and Liberation Theology*, that the caste system and the effects of colonialism and western imperialism over India increased communalism and segregation among communities, especially in the northern regions of the country. When Britain began its rule over India, the feudal autocratic system was replaced by a capitalist-democratic relationship, and the socio-economic transformation of society that resulted from this change led to communal tensions. Slow development rates and other economic constraints led to increased competition for resources and jobs. Political processes, especially after independence, became communalized and ethnically segregated to a degree, which led some Indians to show strong allegiance to their own ethnic groups. Within religious communities, elite members and leaders took advantage of this and began to withdraw and lead separatist movements. For reasons of legitimization, political hostility turned into religious antagonism, and the Muslim *ulama* used their religious authority to condemn the Hindu elite as unbelievers.[21]

DEVELOPING A THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION AND PLURALISM IN INDIA

Engineer recognized that the struggle between the Hindu elite and Muslim *ulama* was grounded in political and economic conflict rather than pious, religious motivations, and that they had a stake in encouraging violence between religious groups. In order to justify the separation and conflict between Muslims and Hindus, the religious leaders turned to the theology of medieval jurists, which not only supported the authority of the elites themselves, but perpetuated the status quo of injustice and conflict. Engineer abhorred this for several reasons and believed that interreligious dialogue was extremely crucial in a society that experienced unrelenting violence between people of different faiths. Therefore, he strongly supported peace and was focused on Islam's message of coexistence and pluralism.[22]

As a leader of the progressive Dawoodi Bohra movement, Engineer became aware of other active groups in India advocating for social change, and joined them in their effort to achieve improvements in Hindu-Muslim relations and fight against the oppressive caste system (of which Muslims were victims and fell just above the Untouchables). Engineer's understanding of Islam grew from this work and his involvement with movements struggling for social justice, reform, and interreligious solidarity, and was influenced by his own personal study of the Islamic tradition. Engineer was also influenced by Marxism, western liberalism, and Christian liberation theology, and developed his understanding of Islam as a means and a resource for social revolution. He wished to put an end to caste and gender oppression, which was closely tied to religious oppression in India.

Because he believed that any understanding of Islam had to respond to contextual circumstances and make a positive contribution to social change by working in solidarity with others, the theology he produced became a theology of liberation and pluralism. Furthermore, it was an *Islamic* theology of liberation because he engaged in a reading of the Islamic scriptures in light of the Indian context. He found that the core values of the Qur'an, which he believed to be justice, equality, and peace, were useful in the struggle to create social justice, foster peaceful coexistence, and overcome class, caste, and gender oppression.

Engineer's Islamic theology of liberation in India is similar to that of Gustavo Gutiérrez's in Latin America. As Gutiérrez says, liberation theology is a "theological reflection born of shared experience in the effort to abolish the present unjust situation and to build a different society, freer and more human".[23] Therefore, engaging in liberation theology is a contextual act that requires solidarity and responds to injustices within a particular society. Engineer, like Gutiérrez, advocates a rereading of scripture, but does so in the context of India rather than Latin America, and looks to the Qur'an and hadith rather than the Bible.

As Gutiérrez asserts, in this case theology is a "second act", and a rereading of the scripture only happens as one responds to contextual oppression and reflects on praxis.[24] Engineer and his followers observed and felt the oppression fostered by political conflict and began to engage in a struggle to overcome injustice and challenge the authority of the *ulama*. In the midst of their struggle they turned to the Qur'an in order to reflect on their action and assure that they were remaining true to the cause of establishing justice and peace on earth according to God's will.

ENGAGING WITH THE QUR'AN

According to Engineer, liberation theology concerns itself with the here and now and has meaning in the world and the process of time. Like Gutiérrez, he cites Marx and believes that religion can only be powerful in its liberating form; it must become an instrument of change used by the marginalized, or else it risks becoming an opiate of the masses. This is the rut in which traditional theology (especially the theology of the *ulama*) lies. It uses metaphysical ideas and arguments to justify actions and exists outside the realm of history, which means that it remains static and unchanging and cannot be used as a tool for change.

When turning to the Qur'an, Engineer cites many verses which prove to him that Islam can be seen as an inherently revolutionary religion. He reminds his audience of Muhammad's challenge to the rich traders of Mecca and the leaders of the Quraysh tribe, who valued power and neglected the poor and needy, and posits that this was a revolutionary act with the intent of upsetting the status quo. Verses such as 2:275 and 9:34 denounce usury and exploitative practices and say that surplus wealth must be given to the needy. Because Islam came to change the status quo in favor of the oppressed, Engineer concludes that any society that allows for exploitation cannot be an Islamic society.[25]

"Islamic" in this sense means just and pleasing to God. Sura 5:8 reads "Do justice, it is nearer to piety", which means that justice is a central tenet of the faith and becomes an integral part of righteousness. Engineer argues that piety is not just a ritualistic concept but is related to social and economic justice. This is exemplified by the liberating nature of Muhammad's struggle to create a new society in Medina which broke away from the existing order in Mecca and was not based on tribal ties or commercial

oligarchy. Although his efforts do not live up to modern standards concerning the extent of freedom and equality, Muhammad was able to foster economic justice and social equality through efforts like elevating the status of women and slaves, especially within the legal code, which Engineer argues was revolutionary at the time.[26]

Through his reading of the Qur'an and understanding of Muhammad's struggle to create a new society based on socio-economic justice, Engineer argues that justice is the most important quality upheld by God. Therefore, God would sooner see a just society in which all people are free from oppression, rather than a totally Muslim society. Engineer says "...the world can endure with justice and unbelief, but not with injustice and Islam".[27] What makes a "just" society depends on the circumstance, and the Qur'an does not rule out any means of achieving it, but states that certain conditions must be met. Engineer says:

> "The Qur'an gives us the highest form of moral consciousness and a very comprehensive concept of justice. For comprehensive justice one needs fulfillment of several other conditions - like freedom of conscience, and freedom of conscience is possible only when one accepts human dignity, and human dignity is possible only when racial, tribal, and national discriminations are rejected."[28]

Freedom of conscience is an important concept in liberation theology because it challenges the traditional theological thought that man's fate is predetermined for him by God. Because liberation theology seeks to liberate the marginalized from their situations of oppression, it inherently supports that people are free to act according to their circumstances. God has given humans rational thought and reason with the Qur'an and *hadith* as guides, rather than canons to be strictly imitated.[29] True believers, called *mu'min,* are those who not only profess faith in God, but also firmly believe in Islamic

values (like justice, equality, and benevolence) and struggle to change the world in accordance with those values.[30]

This struggle is called *jihad*. Engineer argues that *jihad* has always meant "making efforts" or "striving hard", and sura 4:75-76 of the Qur'an says that it must be used for promoting the cause of the weak and oppressed.[31]

> "Why should you not fight in God's cause and for those oppressed men, women, and children who cry out, 'Lord, give us a protector and give us a helper!'? The believers fight for God's cause, while those who reject faith fight for an unjust cause."[32]

Engineer interprets this verse to mean that struggle in God's way means that Muslims must fight against injustice in all its forms. The way in which *jihad* must be done depends on context; sometimes it involves violent measures, but in most cases it does not. The wars Muhammad waged in the name of Islam were justified because he lived in a tribal non-democratic society where war was the rule rather than the exception, and he needed to defend the first Islamic community from outside aggression. In a democratic society, particularly in the context of India, Engineer argues that violence is fruitless. Peace and forgiveness must be practiced in order to create a lasting just society.[33]

This means that *jihad* is not meant to be waged against unbelievers, as many fundamentalists have interpreted it to mean. As mentioned above, it was never God's intent to see a totally Muslim society. Rather, pluralism is God's will; sura 5:48 says that if God had so desired, he would have united all humans into one community. Sura 2:256 says that there is no compulsion in religion and conversion to Islam cannot be forced. Simply professing faith does not mean that one embodies the values of a *mu'min*, and it is ultimately up to God's judgment to decide who is truly faithful. Through the lens of

liberation theology in the context of India, it becomes imperative to focus on the struggle for justice by practicing tolerance for others and fostering pluralism.

Engineer lays great emphasis on this element of pluralism, which sets him apart from those who wish an Islamic order to be implemented for the achievement of God's will. Although he says only a just society can be a truly Islamic society, Engineer is not advocating for Islam to dominate socially or politically in India because he knows that Muslims are a minority and must learn how to coexist in order to prosper. This was influenced greatly by his work with the progressive Dawoodi Bohra movement and the antagonism he observed between India's religious groups. Engineer believed that the key to pluralism and prosperity between religious peoples was dialogue. He understood that religion itself was not the root of the conflict, but leaders who used religion to enhance divisions and fulfill power ambitions.[34]

TRADITIONAL THEOLOGY AND ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM

Engineer argues that theology, as a human construct, is always subject to the dominant interests and attitudes of Muslims, and historically theology has been used to damn other religions in an attempt to gain control over the social and political spheres, especially by leaders who tend to dominate religious discourse and claim a monopoly on religious truth. The idea that is often pushed by those who claim authority over religious truth is that the Muslims constitute one *ummah,* or religious community, and that this should be reflected in the marriage of religion and state. Control of the state means that a totally Islamic system can be put in place and God's will can be carried out through the implementation of shari'a law.

This attitude reflects a kind of Islamic fundamentalism, which Engineer defines as "religious rigidity, militancy and extremism as well as use of Islam for political ends rather than for spiritual and moral development".[35] Fundamentalism is generally a political term that represents those who wish to claim a monopoly on religious truth and control over the state. Religious revivalists, as Charles Kurzman calls them (like the Muslim *ulama* in India), and fundamentalist movements are inspired by the politics of the ruling class rather than by religion, although they may be led by religious figures claiming to have a religiously motivated agenda.

In the fundamentalist ideology, a society is envisioned in which Islam dominates all spheres of life. This partially explains the push for an Islamic State, which assures the domination of Islam not only in the political sphere, but in the social and economic spheres, which are regulated by *shari'ah*. This ideology overlooks concepts of brotherhood and equality in favor of penal measures that do not threaten the status quo. The conservative *ulama* do not allow for *ijtihad* (reinterpretation of Islamic law) to happen, so the *shari'ah* law they support is grounded in one understanding of medieval Islam, which Engineer says is useless in the modern context. Instead, law must respond to modern needs in order to be dynamic and bring change to society. This kind of *shari'ah* is more in the spirit of Muhammad's teachings of higher morality and his struggle to bring change to 7th century Arabia.[36]

Engineer's response to Islamic fundamentalism was partially influenced by the actions of Ayatollah Khomeini and the establishment of an Islamic State in Iran. The groups who led the revolution, such as the People's Mujahideen of Iran, wanted to create social change in Iran, which had dangerous implications for the upper classes. However,

in the last two years of the revolution, the clerics took power and were able to establish an Islamic State which expressed the politics of the ruling class. The same religion that was used as an ideological weapon to fight the Shah became the religion used to enforce the status quo.

Khomeini's ideology was grounded in a medieval status-quoist Islam that believed Islam could only remain sacred if it was detached from time and place. Like many other fundamentalists and religious revivalists, Khomeini pushed the idea that religion becomes tainted when blended with the human element, especially certain aspects of westernization and modernization. Instead, Muslims had to imitate the golden age of Islam that existed under the Prophet and the first Islamic community. In order to ensure that they remained on the correct path, they were to obey the clerics in power, who had sole authority to provide religious truth.[37]

Engineer drew many parallels between the practices of the Iranian clerics of the early Islamic State and the behavior of the Indian *ulama* of his own time. The clerics and *ulama* both took sole ownership of the definition of "true Islam" in order to protect their authority over Muslims. In doing so they glorified feudal values as Islamic values while deeming any deviation from them un-Islamic. Engineer found the ideology they pushed to be hypocritical and self-serving.[38]

Engineer's Islamic liberation theology represents a departure from this Islamic fundamentalism partially because he realized that historical context gives religion meaning. Part of Islam's power as a divine gift from God is that it is adaptable to fit the needs of Muslims. Islam was revealed specifically in the context of 7th century Arabia and the verses and stories of the Qur'an reflect that. It is the job of all Muslims to find the

transcendent meaning of the message in their own time and place. One of the tools given to humans by God to assist in this task is rational thought, which means that Muslims must always undergo processes of intellectual reorientation as time goes on and brings change. If religion is to be a meaningful project that works to establish justice, it must be free from sterile rituals and theological obscurantism.[39]

ENGINEER'S APPROACH TO PLURALISM IN INDIA

Engineer takes issue with Islamic fundamentalism for many reasons, such as the influenced of his experience living in a non-Muslim majority country and his belief in the value of pluralism. As a minority, Muslims in India had no chance of dominating the state. Even if they did, an Islamic state would not be practical because it would marginalize the large majority of non-Muslims in the country and treat them unjustly under *shari'ah* law. Engineer believed even Muslim majority countries should not implement strict *shari'ah* law because the minorities of non-Muslims, however small, would suffer. The bottom line was that non-Muslims should be given political rights equal to those of Muslims. Regardless of religious orientation, there should never be a distinction between people within a political community that thrives on justice.[40]

In his liberal interpretation of the Qur'an, Engineer argues that there is no doctrinal position taken in Islam concerning the apparatus of the state. No instruction is given on how to form an Islamic polity. This is part of the reason why he objected Khomeini's Islamic State. Muslims are only pushed to create a just society by using rational thought in a process of consultation with others, a Qur'anic concept called s*hura*. In the modern context, the meaning of *shura* supports democratic processes and proper democratic institutions in which elections are a requirement. Although democracy is a

vague concept and is often varied and imperfect in practice, Engineer believes it to be the best way to ensure that the prominent values of his Islamic liberation theology, justice and freedom of conscience, can be enjoyed by all. Because the Qur'an allows Muslims to use the best means of creating justice in whatever context they find themselves, to Engineer, adopting democratic governance in the modern context is the most practical way of accommodating pluralism, protecting minority rights, and embodying the Qur'anic spirit of justice.[41]

For this reason, Engineer supported the secular, democratic course India had taken in the post-colonial years. That it was secular in character was not problematic because he believed that the state and religion should be separate, which stemmed from the belief that there was no Islamic doctrinal position on the state. Secularism would ensure the stability of a democracy that protected the rights of all people, but secularism itself could not maintain stability without genuine pluralism. This required Muslims to engage in what Engineer called an active respect that went beyond passive tolerance of other religious peoples. Active respect required that Muslims outwardly accept people of other faiths and begin a dialogue with them that worked towards the elimination of communal tensions and sectarianism. It also required self-criticism and a critical evaluation of traditional theology and the practices that are influenced by it.[42]

CONCLUSION

In India, Asghar Ali Engineer developed a theology of liberation in response to oppression fostered by the caste system and political conflict between Muslim and Hindu communities. The communal and ethnic tensions that were fostered by this conflict, which made pluralism impossible, was rooted in the power of the religious elites. The

Muslim *ulama* based their traditional religious understandings in feudal Islam, which was outdated and irrelevant to the modern lives of Indians and served to perpetuate the status quo. Feudalist understandings of Islam dictated that the *ulama* had the only power to interpret the scriptures, which legitimized them and kept them in power.

Opposition to the *ulama*, interreligious conflict, and marginalization through the caste system caused Engineer and his followers within the progressive Dawoodi Bohra movement to join with other active groups struggling to create change, foster coexistence, and abolish existing structures of oppression. From this struggle emerged Engineer's Islamic liberation theology, which critically reflected on this struggle in light of the Qur'an. He encouraged Muslims to engage in their own reading of the Islamic scriptures, which he believed to promote a peaceful message of justice and equality.

Because theology must be a "second act" in the struggle for liberation, Engineer's reading of the Qur'an was colored by the context in which he lived. His liberation theology was preceded by an understanding of traditional theology and his experience struggling against the authority of both the Muslim *ulama* and the Indian caste system. Therefore, his work incorporated an analysis that differentiated between liberation theology and traditional theology. Traditional theology was serving as a tool to perpetuate the status quo, which meant that religion was manipulated to justify conflict and did nothing to challenge sources of oppression. However, Engineer knew that the root of this conflict was not religion itself, but leaders who used religion to enhance divisions and fulfill power ambitions. Theology needed to be liberated from this obscurantism in order to become a force for liberation itself. Reading the Qur'an in light of this situation meant that Engineer was able to highlight God's desire for justice and

equality. True believers (*mu'min*) are required to struggle (*jihad*) until all forms of oppression are abolished and equality is established.

Since his struggle was aimed towards fostered interreligious dialogue and peace, his work grew to become a theology of liberation wedded to a theology of pluralism. This was affected by the non-Muslim majority character of India. He knew that creating an Islamic State or ostracizing the religious other could not bring the oppression of Muslims in India to an end. It had to be done by joining together with non-Muslims for the cause of justice, to create peace not only for Muslims, but for all people. To borrow the language of Gutiérrez, through critical reflection on praxis in light of the Qur'an, Engineer found that pluralism was in accordance with God's will for complete social justice.

CHAPTER 4: FARID ESACK

Farid Esack was born in 1959 into the poor working class of a Cape Town suburb in South Africa. In his early years, his mother's life as a single parent, and the hardship she endured under what he called the "triple oppression of women under apartheid": racism, capitalism, and patriarchy, greatly influenced him. These oppressions intensified when an apartheid law called the Group Areas Act forcibly removed his family to an impoverished township called Bonteheuwel. His mother could only find a job as an overworked and underpaid factory employee, and died at an early age, which Esack attributes to "the burden of economic exploitation and patriarchy."[43]

Esack professes in his work *Qur'an, Liberation & Pluralism* that he was deeply religious as a Muslim from a very young age and was extremely influenced by the suffering he witnessed all around him. He spent most of his youth in a state of poverty, but felt solidarity within the religious community around him. Christian and Muslim neighbors within ghettoes would rely on one another for favors, extra food and water, or emotional support. They also relied on local mosques or churches, which were a staple in the ghettoes. It was in the mosque of his township where Esack began to study the Qur'an and Islam and the roots of his liberation theology began to grow.[44]

Because of his situation in life, Esack was instinctively drawn to the verses of the Qur'an that said God would help those who were faithful and true to the message of his religion. At the age of nine, this belief led him to join an international Muslim revivalist movement called Tablighi Jama'ah. He also became a member of an outspoken group called the National Youth Action which was anti-apartheid and committed to radical socio-political change. When he was fifteen years old, he won a scholarship to undergo

theological training in Pakistan, where he spent eight years deepening his understanding of his religion.[45]

While he was in Pakistan, Esack noticed that there was a disconnect between his "frightfully conservative" training[46] and the progressive beliefs he had internalized as a child in South Africa. He believed in a God who favored justice and supported those who worked for the empowerment of the marginalized and oppressed, regardless of religion, race, or gender. In Pakistan, however, he observed a religiously exclusivist society in which Islam thrived as the dominant religion and religious minorities became outcasts as a result.[47] He personally could not accept an Islam that did not accept the friends he had made among the religious others in his township. While in Pakistan, he managed to establish close relationships with a few Pakistani Catholics, who first introduced him to Christian liberation theology. In later years, liberation theology and the work of Gustavo Gutiérrez profoundly influenced his work in South Africa against apartheid.

After his return to South Africa, he became part of a team that founded the Call of Islam in 1984, a religious-political group that engaged in interfaith work and mobilized nationally against apartheid and gender inequality. Esack spent several years as an activist and a political priest, attending and spearheading hundreds of anti-apartheid marches and protest meetings. In 1990, he left South Africa again to pursue a doctorate in Qur'anic interpretation. He spent five years in Britain and Germany and attained a Western, secularly-oriented education in religion, and by the end of his studies he became one of the leading academic interpreters of Islam in the world. His works are rooted in a perspective that blends together personal experience and faith, an understanding of traditional theology, and a secular, western education. This perspective is especially

evident in the Islamic liberation theology he develops, which stresses liberal values and relies heavily on Qur'anic exegesis and is strongly connected to his experience as a Muslim under apartheid. Much to the frustration of his more conservative counterparts, the Islam he advocates tolerates religious diversity and demands equality for all people despite race and gender.[48]

DEVELOPING A THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION AND PLURALISM IN SOUTH AFRICA

During the height of the struggle against apartheid, Esack observed that religion, as a major influence in the lives of South Africans, was invoked in two main ways. The first way, accommodation theology, was used to support the status quo and justify existing structures of oppression, by ignoring the socio-economic aspect of religion in favor of other-worldly concerns. In South Africa, this accommodation theology merged with the ideology of apartheid, and religion (particularly Christianity) was used by those in power to maintain their hegemony. The second way, liberation theology, emerged to combat accommodation theology and the dominant structures of oppression. A growing number of religious leaders and organizations in South Africa ended the silence against oppression and professed belief in a God who desired the unity of mankind and the empowerment of the marginalized.[49]

It was in the context of apartheid that Esack observed the workings of a liberation theology among the marginalized South Africans of all faiths. Influenced by his interest in Christian liberation theology and his background as a Muslim and scholar in Qur'anic exegesis and Islamic theology, he observed the struggle of the faithful against oppression in South Africa and developed an Islamic liberation theology that made sense of this struggle in light of the word of God. He attempted to understand how political activism

affected the Muslim community's understanding of the Qur'an and the religious other, and looked specifically at the use of Qur'anic texts by Islamists and how their understanding of Islam changed as it became a tool for liberation.

Esack was also motivated by his own commitment to justice, which stemmed from his experience as a child, and believed the greater themes he explored in his liberation theology could resonate in other situations of political, social, and economic injustice, not just within the borders of South Africa.[50] He believed his "South African Qur'anic hermeneutic of religious pluralism for liberation"[51] to be a part of a larger, universal struggle that required a reinterpretation of religion in order to use it as a tool for creating and maintaining justice. In *Qur'an, Liberation & Pluralism,* Esack cites Gustavo Gutiérrez and Asghar Ali Engineer, as well as other theologians who deal with liberal themes like Amina Wadud-Muhsin, Hassan Hanafi, and Fatima Mernissi, as the backdrop to his work on liberation theology.[52]

Esack defines a theology of liberation as a theology with two main objectives. It actively works towards the freedom all people from oppressive and exploitative structures regardless of gender, race, and religion, and it works towards freeing religion from theological obscurantism and passivism. These objectives are achieved through a process that requires active struggle and ultimately results in the liberation of those who participate in the struggle. An Islamic liberation theology in particular, is inspired by the Qur'an, reflects on it, and uses it as a tool for liberation.[53] The language he uses is very similar to that of other liberation theologians, especially Gustavo Gutiérrez, whose work, as mentioned above, deeply influenced him.

THE HERMENEUTICS OF ISLAMIC LIBERATION THEOLOGY

Esack begins his Islamic liberation theology by explaining how the Qur'an becomes relevant in a situation of oppression and a tool for liberation. Any interpreter of the Qur'an must realize that it was revealed in a certain context and conditioned by historical circumstances. This means that Muslims cannot see the text as transcendent of time, or existing outside of time and place. This contrasts the ideology of Islamic fundamentalists, who are similarly committed to the text but have an a-historical view of Islam and believe that it can solve all problems through a narrow interpretation of the text. This results in the goal to strictly implement *shari'ah* law in contemporary times regardless of its origins in the context of seventh century Arabia.

However, Esack argues that the verses cannot be divorced from the time and place in which they were revealed and transplanted into a new context because they lose meaning. As a "progressive revelation", God revealed his word to the Prophet over time, in order to provide day-to-day guidance in the midst of the struggle to establish the first Islamic community. Esack points out that the Qur'an recognizes its own contextual nature (17:106) and what makes God so powerful is that he can speak to his people in terms of their realities and reveal his will in terms they will understand.[54] This does not detract from its divine quality. Instead, Esack argues that the text must be seen as eternally relevant. While one must understand the Qur'an's original meaning as it pertained to Muhammad and his followers, one also needs to contextualize it deeper meaning in order to determine its relevance in the contemporary context. Reformist scholars realize interpretation of the Qur'an cannot be relevant unless it considers context and discerns how the central tenets of the faith relate to modern times.[55]

Interpretation of a holy scripture becomes problematic when one accepts that humans are imperfect beings without access to the transcendent truth that only God knows. In this case, hermeneutics become necessary. Based on the recognition that humans come to holy texts with their own biases based on motivation, culture, and tradition, "a given hermeneutic is essentially a self-consciously chosen starting point containing ideological, attitudinal, and methodological components designed to aid the work of interpretation and facilitate maximum understanding."[56] Having a hermeneutic allows the interpreter to remain humble and brings him or her closer to an authentic reading of scripture as it functions within context.

Esack argues that in a racially divided, exploitative, and patriarchal society, a hermeneutic must be forged to read the Qur'an in such a way that it advances and maintains the liberation of all people within a pluralistic society. Esack stresses, like Gutiérrez, that in situations of injustice, theology comes as a "second act" and is the product of reflection that follows struggle, or praxis for liberation. The liberation theology of South African progressive Islamists was born of the struggle against apartheid; therefore, the hermeneutics employed to engage with the Qur'an were colored by this struggle. In apartheid South Africa, from the active struggle of progressive Islamists against injustice emerged hermeneutical keys that acted as "theological glasses" through which to look at the Qur'an and see it as a tool for change.[57]

HERMENEUTICAL KEYS

The first hermeneutical key that Esack discusses is *taqwa*. Through Esack's interpretation of the Qur'an, a *muslim* is someone who is submitted to God in a personal and social sense, and *taqwa* represents the struggle to remain true to this commitment.

Social responsibility to God requires that Muslims care for his creation and people by carrying on with the Prophet's task of transformation and liberation to create a society in which all humans can flourish. *Taqwa* is a quality to which believers must aspire, but in a context of oppression, it also becomes a hermeneutical key because it commits the interpreter to a process of personal and socio-political transformation. It minimizes the extent to which the Qur'an can be manipulated for personal gain because interpreters are held accountable for others and for the transformation of society in alignment with principles of justice and freedom.[58]

The second hermeneutical key is *tawhid* ("unification"), a concept that stresses the unity of God as the single Lord and source of Creation. The belief that God is the supreme being without any partner is central to the Islamic worldview, and attributing the authority of God is *shirk*, the antithesis of *tawhid*. In a context of oppression, *tawhid* takes on a socio-political dimension and becomes a world view that advocates for the unity of mankind and abhors those who assume authority and exploit other human beings. Apartheid becomes unacceptable because it creates division between humans based on the glorification of one race over another and acts as the credo of a hierarchical and oppressive society. Like *taqwa, tawhid* becomes not only a state to strive for, but a lens through which to look at the Qur'an in one's struggle. It prevents the reader from assuming the authority of God and making decisions based on the text that create conditions of *shirk*, that is, idolatry - holding another "god" before God.[59]

Al-nas is a hermeneutical key that is grounded in the principles of *taqwa* and *tawhid*. It refers to "the people" as a social collective and as keepers of divine trust, meaning that humans are the protectors of his creation and responsible for carrying out

his will on earth (sura 2:30). Esack, like Engineer, pushes the idea that God did not

exercise sovereignty in a political sense, but allows humans to use rational thought to

discern the best way to establish and maintain justice through the state. Combined with

taqwa and *tawhid*, *al-nas* assures that the Qur'an is interpreted in the interest of the

people and therefore in the interest of God, and prevents the reader from usurping the

sovereignty of God. In the 1980's in South Africa, the idea of "the people" rose up as a

socio-political alternative to the apartheid state, and it demanded that popular sovereignty

should reign. Progressive Islamists pushed the idea that God wished for temporal political

sovereignty to belong to the people as a collective, rather than to the South African elites

who used apartheid to divide and oppress people in order to maintain their positions of

power.[60]

  Within the hermeneutic of *al-nas* lies the idea of the *mustad'afun*, or the people of

inferior social status who are marginalized and oppressed in a socio-economic sense. An

important characteristic of the *mustad'afun* is that someone else is responsible for their

condition and status in life. God has a preferential option for the marginalized, which is

affirmed by the methodologies of the prophets and the revolutionary messages they

preached that challenged socio-economic systems based on exploitation. The numerous

verses of the Qur'an denouncing the accumulation and hoarding of wealth, as well as

those that link faith to humanism and socio-economic justice, also express God's

"preferential option" for the *mustad'afun*, as it were. *Mustad'afun* becomes a useful

hermeneutical category because it requires that the interpreter be placed among the

marginalized and reads the Qur'an through their eyes. This ensures that suffering is taken

into account and the struggle to create a society based on God's will incorporates the struggle for justice and liberation.[61]

In the Qur'an, justice, or *qist*, forms the basis of the natural order of the universe, and is equated with truth and faith. Sura 56:25 describes the enforcement of *qist* as one of the primary objectives of revelation and a step on the path to *taqwa*. As discussed above, Muslims are accountable to God and have the social responsibility to uphold justice and ensure that God's will is manifest on earth. This is achieved through *jihad*, which Esack defines as the struggle to transform oneself and one's society. *Jihad* represents the conscious action, or praxis, taken by those who wish to liberate society from all modes of oppression. To the South African Islamists, this meant establishing comprehensive justice for all people, regardless of faith.[62]

ESACK'S APPROACH TO PLURALISM IN SOUTH AFRICA

Esack incorporates his personal engagement in activism for comprehensive justice and the vision for religious pluralism in South Africa into his liberation theology. Those who resisted apartheid began to discover that the religious other was a strong ally in the struggle against injustice, and Esack wished to prove in his work that it was possible to live as a faithful Muslim while working with people of other faiths towards a more humane society. Like Engineer, who called for an active respect of the religious other that went above passive tolerance, Esack believed that interfaith solidarity actively working towards justice was required, rather than simple dialogue. By re-examining the way the Qur'an approaches the other through a contextual lens, he was able to develop an Islamic theology of pluralism, that supported religious inclusivism and progressive politics.[63]

Esack first approaches the question of pluralism by admitting that the Qur'an does seem to reject the religious other and that traditional Muslim theology has reified this rejection and glorified Islam as the one true religion. Interpreters cannot be apologetic and ignore the verses dealing with the religious other, but must use a hermeneutic of pluralism for liberation in order to redefine them. The terms *iman* ("faith"), *islam* ("submit"), and *kufr* ("disbelief") have historically been used negatively by those wishing to demonize non-Muslims, but progressive Islamists seeking alliance with the religious other were able to redefine them in a way that was meaningful to the cause of liberation.[64]

Esack, like Engineer, is careful to point out the difference between professed faith and true faith when discussing *iman*. The Qur'an states that *iman* is a quality within a person that can increase, so it is more than just verbal testimony. It is an active response to the presence of God in the universe; therefore, a *mu'min*, or someone who has *iman,* is not only committed to God, but does righteous deeds and works for socio-economic justice. The main point that Esack wishes to highlight is that because *iman* is an individual's conviction and struggle, it cannot be confined to one socio-economic community. There are many within a Muslim community who profess the faith but do not act with *iman*, and many outside it who act with *iman* but do not call themselves Muslims.[65]

Esack approaches the term *islam* in a new light as well; it must be examined in order to understand Islam's relationship to pluralism or exclusivism. Sura 3:19 says "True religion, in God's eyes, is *islam.*"[66] In the dominant contemporary Muslim discourse, *islam* has come to mean only the greater religion of Islam with a capital "I", and excludes

non-Muslims. However, *islam* with a lowercase "i" has a personal dimension as well as a group one, which implies that personal submission to God can exist outside of the Muslim community. The Qur'an treats the idea of religion in various ways; earlier in the Meccan period it emphasized the sense of personal submission to God, and later in the Medinan period it was used more in the collective sense of the word. Assisted by the hermeneutics that help the interpreter to read the Qur'an in light of the struggle for liberation, religion must be viewed as a believer's active response to God's will for his people rather than the ethno-social membership within an exclusive group of people.[67]

This idea of revealing one's level of commitment to God through action is supported further by the term *kufr*. In traditional discourse, *kufr* has come to be a derogatory label, and means unbelievers (non-Muslims) or the rejected other. Various forms of the word have become abusive terms to normalize marginalization, so the motivation to rethink the term is human and connected to the struggle for justice. In light of this struggle, Esack has taken it to mean someone who actively obstructs justice, rather than someone who passively chooses non-belief.

Someone who is guilty of *kufr* oppresses the weak (4:167-168, 14:13, 34:32), chooses silence in the face of oppression (5:79), or hoards wealth and uses it to obstruct the will of God (9:76-79). They recognize the unity of God and understand the implications of concepts like *tawhid* and *taqwa*, but completely reject them for monetary gain, tribal loyalty, and preservation of the unjust status quo (3:21). *Kufr* is the antonym of *iman* and *islam*, and in Esack's liberation theology, it is important to view it as just as much of a conscious attitude and set of concrete actions as those qualities are. Therefore, contemporary Muslims cannot be so quick to condemn harmless non-Muslims as guilty

of *kufr*, especially if they are non-Muslims by accident of birth. A liberation theology that is concerned with pluralism should only struggle against those who practice *kufr* by choice, even if they call themselves Muslims.[68]

This redefinition of *iman* and *islam* highlights that it is important to go beyond labels, which could very well be imagined by humans rather than mandated by God, and do right by a God who is obsessed with justice. Those who are willing to struggle for justice and bring about the manifestation of God's will on earth are closer to him than those who do not, no matter what they call themselves. God is fully aware of what people do, and the Qur'an repeats numerous times that God is the only one who will have the final judgment so people must be mindful of him. Esack states that the Qur'an does not believe in labels, but in actions,[69] as revealed in sura 2:177:

> The truly good are those who believe in God and the Last Day, in the angels, the Scriptures, and the prophets; who give away some of their wealth, however much they cherish it, to their relatives, to orphans, the needy, travelers and beggars, and to liberate those in bondage; those who keep up the prayer and pay the prescribed alms; who keep pledges when they make them; who are steadfast in misfortune, adversity, and times of danger. These are the ones who are true, and it is they who are aware of God.[70]

Because actions are more telling than labels or mere professions of belief, it can thus be argued that those who are truly faithful and active for God can exist outside of the Muslim community. This is supported by the verses of the Qur'an that accept the People of the Book, generally understood as the other monotheistic religions, and makes it a requirement of Muslims to believe in the genuineness of all revealed religion (2:136). God recognizes righteousness in people regardless of birth or heritage and those who are active and truly faithful will receive their reward with him (2:62). The People of the Book were only condemned when they exhibited certain behaviors such as claiming a

privileged position with God based on history, birth, and tribe rather than on praxis and morality (4:48, 5:18, 6:26), but these are traits abhorred in all people regardless of religious orientation.[71] These verses also imply that the Qur'an condemned the appropriation of God by any community of people, and warned Muslims against doing the same. Inclusivity is thus advocated as a measure to ensure that all people are free to worship God. In light of these verses as viewed through a hermeneutic committed to liberation, Esack argues the Qur'an is in strong support of religious pluralism.[72]

Progressive Islamists in South Africa used these new understandings of *iman, islam, kufr,* and the People of the Book to support their drive for a pluralistic society and their mobilization in conjunction with people of other faith against the structures of apartheid. Their hermeneutic for interreligious solidarity against injustice required that they reject the situation bound categories of the past that treated non-Muslims as adversaries; instead, it was imperative that they allied with anyone who was marginalized and engaged in the struggle for justice, regardless of religious orientation.[73] They were able to redefine the relationship between self and other in the context of a struggle for liberation, and as a result, they produced a theology of religious pluralism which was wedded to a theology of liberation.[74]

LIBERATION THEOLOGY VS. TRADITIONAL AND MODERN THEOLOGY

Esack's liberation theology represents a break from traditional theology and modern theology, and he explains why by emphasizing three main points. The first reason for the difference between them is the location of the interpreter of the Qur'an. Traditional theologians are those who held positions of religious authority over Muslims and used laws to reduce Islam to formal, passive rituals in order to perpetuate their

authority. Modern theologians are located within the secular academic world and only address themselves to privileged, serious thinkers. Both modes of theology work to perpetuate the status quo and theological hegemony. Liberation theology, on the other hand, is performed in solidarity with the marginalized and insists that in situations of oppression, religion can only be experienced as liberative praxis that challenges that status quo and the idea that only a few elite thinkers have the authority to create theology.[75]

The second reason is that theology is always a second act in a situation of oppression. Esack borrows Gutiérrez's idea that theology is the product of the reflection that follows struggle for liberation. Traditional theologians view their theology as ahistorical and as a set of guidelines that prescribe Muslims' action in the world. Liberation theology, however, admits its contextual nature. Faith may come as a form of preunderstanding before liberative praxis, but in situations of oppression, theology does not. The marginalized respond to this oppression, and in the midst of their struggle, they turn to the Qur'an for support and guidance.

The third reason is that for those engaged with liberation theology, truth can never be absolute. God is the only being in possession of the one authentic truth, but he provides followers with the tools necessary to bring them closer to it. Hermeneutics are useful in this process, a process which Esack says is a continuous journey. Traditional and modern scholars claim that only certain aspects of the truth can be known, and they have used theology to prove those truths while monopolizing the right to do so. Liberation theology, however, helps to create truth in the world and bring it closer to the just world God intended.[76]

Esack's evaluation of traditional and modern theology is rooted in his experience with it. He was a student of traditional theology in Pakistan and a student of modern theology in Germany and Europe and became very familiar with the ideology and methodology of both. It is clear in his work that he is a competent scholar of both disciplines and he blends together modern western theological technique with extensive knowledge of traditional scholars. However, using his own personal faith, liberal values, and knowledge of liberation theology, he is able to critique traditional and modern scholars and evaluate what is valuable and what is inoperative or unfounded in their theologies. In *Qur'an, Liberation & Pluralism*, he uses this critique to his advantage in order to set his Islamic liberation theology apart and claim that situations of oppression call for a more progressive theology. He discredits the status-quoist theology of traditional and modern scholars as it is often self-important and only serves to perpetuate structures of injustice.

CONCLUSION

It seems at times that Esack's Islamic liberation theology comes from a desire to harmonize all the major influences over his life: marginalization in his early life, personal faith and conviction, conservative theological training, and a secular and western education. His attraction to Christian liberation theology and the connections he drew in his mind between two contexts of oppression, one in Latin America and one in South Africa, may have led him to describe the situation he observed in Gutiérrez's language. However, while he does give credit to the liberation theologians who inspired him and relies on their precedent in his work, it would be a mistake to overlook his personal commitment to the struggle for liberation and his belief that the underlying themes of

liberation theology are transcendent and can apply globally. Esack asserts that it is the context of the situation of oppression that affects the form liberation theology will take. This is highlighted by his emphasis on liberation theology as a "second act". Because the marginalized who look to their religion for support do so only after reflecting on their struggle for liberation, their theology is colored by context and bound to it.

Esack believed that if the Qur'an is to be actualized in a particular society, all interpretations of it must naturally be contextual. This does not take away from the power of the Qur'an, but enhances it as a text that is adaptable and relevant in all historical contexts. Because the South African context was a diverse society dominated by apartheid and oppression, the theology that emerged had to be concerned with the liberation of the marginalized and accommodate the reality of religious diversity by advocating pluralism.

Esack and his fellow progressive Islamists utilized hermeneutical keys to remain self-aware and engage in an authentic reading of the text that kept them aligned with God's will in their struggle against injustice. Faithful activists were required to respect *tawhid* and *taqwa* while supporting God's preferential option for the poor through *jihad* in collaboration with the religious other. These hermeneutics not only guided their liberative praxis, but also served to liberate the interpreter and the Qur'an itself from theological obscurantism and chauvinism that perpetuated injustice and demonized the religious other. Esack believed that liberation theology was authentic in its mission and commitment to God and his creation, but recognized that interpreters are fallible and unable to remain totally objective, especially in situations of oppression. He did not believe, however, that this should discourage the fight for justice:

Anyone who engages in the contemporary discipline of hermeneutics knows that there are no guarantees of being theologically absolutely correct. I do, however, know that those who claim to have such guarantees have not done anything to address the causes of starvation, exploitation, and racial strife in our land.[77]

At the human level, Esack believed the unjust conditions in South Africa under apartheid warranted immediate action and required solidarity. Based on the exclusivism and the totalitarian and passive nature of popular established Islamic theological traditions, it seemed that Islam would hinder the struggle for liberation and only enhance oppression. However, as a committed Muslim, Esack refused to believe that the God he cherished could tolerate the suffering he witnessed. In the light of the struggle against oppression, Islam's inherent values of solidarity and justice were brought to the forefront and used as a tool by Esack and his fellow progressive Islamists. This proved to Esack that religion could find a place within a pluralistic society and could remain true to its nature and core values without being passive, hidden, or oppressive.

It is... only on the battlefield for human dignity for all of God's people, for freedom and justice, that we shall see and experience the point of our faith and what it actually does for us in our lives.[78]

CHAPTER 5: HAMID DABASHI

Hamid Dabashi is an Iranian-American Professor of Comparative Literature and Iranian Studies at Columbia University. He was born in Iran in 1951and received a secular education in Iran and the United States. Although Hamid Dabashi self-identifies some of his work as "Islamic liberation theology" and is influenced by Gutiérrez, he is difficult to incorporate into this paper because he does not quite fit the model of Engineer and Esack's liberation theologies. His Islamic liberation theology provides hardly any interpretation of the Qur'an and thus does not fit Gutiérrez's definition "critical reflection on praxis in the light of the word of God". However, he still utilizes much of the same critique as Esack and Engineer, and calls for the struggle against oppression in collaboration with the religious other. Digging a little deeper reveals that what Engineer and Esack have done within the borders of a nation, Dabashi has applied to the global community.

In *Islamic Liberation Theology: Resisting the Empire*, Hamid Dabashi argues that the world we live in today is a post-modern world which is seeing the emergence of the United States as a lone superpower and the rise of an amorphous globalized capital that no longer submits to colonial or western interests. This post-modern world is a transitional period, and is characterized by pointless iconic violence, the collapse of the power dynamic of "Islam and the West", and the end of Islamic ideology. At the expense of the people and nations outside its borders, the United States is expanding its empire in an attempt to control globalized capital, using violent means justified by 9/11. Muslims, faced with an uncharted future, wish to find a place in the global redistribution of power and struggle towards freedom and justice. According to Dabashi, this liberation theology

must engage in a global resistance to the evils of the empire (in this case, the United States) and must go beyond denominational divides to be effective and truly liberating for all peoples.

THE COLLAPSE OF "THE WEST"

Dabashi believes that the post-modern world is seeing the collapse of the binary "Islam and the West", which was generated and sustained during the course of the colonial encounter of Muslims with European modernity. "The West" as a category of civilization is no longer useful because the world is in the process of a global reconfiguration of power and politics. Under colonial conditions, capital had a center with a designated periphery for colonial operations, but in a postmodern world, capital has now become globalized and amorphous, which is in the process of creating new power dynamics. This has played out in the unification of Europe into a global power that is independent of and often in opposition to the United States, which has risen as a superpower and is obsessed with gaining control of the new globalized capital.[79]

The collapse of "the West" meant an end to Islamic ideology, which Dabashi defines as the organizing principle of political resistance to colonial modernity. Militant Islamism, which turned faith into a form of ideological resistance, evolved to contest European colonialism and grew in conjunction with anti-colonial nationalism and revolutionary socialism. According to Dabashi, this militant form of Islamism was justifiable in its historical context because colonizers criminally robbed colonies of valuable resources and humanity. Although it was viable in its historical context, Islamism is no longer a useful option in the resistance against the global empire. What ultimately caused the de-legitimization of Islamism was the Iranian Revolution and the

advent of the Islamic State. This highlighted the consequences of relying on Islamic Law, which rejected diversity, bound subjects to medieval jurisprudence, and did not allow for the creation of free and autonomous citizens of a republic. The de-legitimization of Islamism, coupled with the collapse of "the West", leaves Muslim in a "naked world" where historic Islamic discourse has been exhausted and there is no longer an interlocutor to engage with. This gives rise to what Dabashi calls "iconic violence."[80]

"ICONIC VIOLENCE" VS. LIBERATION THEOLOGY

Dabashi states that 9/11 signifies "the end of militant Islamism... and the commencement of a mode of senseless iconic violence for immediate and spectacular result"[81] (256). The events of 9/11 are no more than "intermediary and confused acts of visual anarchism in dire search for a post-Western interlocution" and have no legitimacy because they are not founded in national liberation movements. Pointless acts of violence are also committed by the United States in the attempt to secure global capital under its control. It has promoted global warmongering (especially in Israel, Afghanistan, and Iraq) and engaged in aggressive militarism to protect national interests at the cost of many innocent lives, civil liberties, and human rights. In a post 9/11 world, this violence often targets Muslims, who are associated with a religion that the United States has demonized through foreign policy.[82]

This military aggression creates a climate in which Muslims' struggle for justice and dignity is fully legitimate, although Dabashi claims that this struggle must now take the form of liberation theology rather than iconic violence. Iconic violence is stuck in the past; it is ineffective for liberation in a globalized world due to its engagement with the collapsed West and delegitimized militant Islamism. The West no longer exists as an

interlocutor, and Islam must now negotiate with globalization. Islamic liberation theology is legitimate in this context, because it liberates Islam from endemic afflictions, institutionalized fanaticism, and anti-democratic attitudes.[83]

Liberation theology must engage in a global conversation with other oppressed groups, accept the authority of other world religions, and redefine the use of theodicy, which attempts to explain the reason for evil. Theodicy can no longer passively identify and explain the evils that exist within the world, but must explore alternatives and be willing to engage in creative conversation with other multicultural liberation movements.[84] Liberation theology must connect to Islam's cosmopolitan roots and allow for "regional alliances based on crosscurrents of ideas, sentiments, ideologies, and cultures",[85] going beyond denominational divides. This will result in the integration of Muslim communities into global, transnational, and liberation movements in the active struggle against "predatory empires."[86]

CONCLUSION

Dabashi's work *Islamic Liberation Theology: Resisting the Empire* is extremely dense and its structure does not mirror that of Engineer and Esack. He does not refer to the Qur'an or provide an analysis of its major themes, nor does he use the language of liberation theology, which relies heavily on the work of Gustavo Gutiérrez. Despite the title of the book, it is admittedly difficult to discern how his work applies to liberation theology, until one approaches the conclusions he makes.

Dabashi advocates for many of the same values upon which liberation theology is founded. Like Gutiérrez, he recognizes that oppression in any form is unacceptable and that theology ought to be involved in the effort to totally abolish it. While Esack deals

with oppression under apartheid and Engineer deals with oppression under the Caste system and religious conflict, the kind of oppression that Dabashi addresses is perpetrated by the United States and any other player that attempts to seize control of global capital through violent means. Although he often specifies that the United States lately has targeted the Muslims of the Middle East, Dabashi asserts that these Muslims are part of a greater global community and must join with others to end oppression. The community that Dabashi defends is an international one. Therefore, the modern global context colors his liberation theology, which Dabashi takes well beyond borders of a certain country, in contrast to Esack and Engineer's liberation theologies.

Dabashi also juxtaposes his liberation theology against the precedent of Islamist fundamentalism. While he believes that Islamism and violence were justifiable in the context of colonialism, in the present context they lose meaning and must be replaced by a new method of achieving justice and equality. Islamism also loses legitimacy in the global context as it incorporates an exclusivist ideology. Because the community he wishes to strengthen is international, Dabashi automatically must account for diversity. Therefore, he is like Engineer and Esack within their non-Muslim majority contexts because he supports religious pluralism. But in this case, it is because he believes that a global conversation must be started if oppression is ever to be combated.

CHAPTER SIX: POST-ISLAMISM

Now that the Islamic liberation theologies of Engineer, Esack, and Dabashi have been explored, this chapter shifts gears and attempts to explain why an Islamic liberation theology has not emerged from the context of a Muslim majority, where its religious ideology would seem to enjoy legitimacy. I explore post-Islamism as a possible alternative to Islamic liberation theology in the Middle East, on the basis sharing a similar religious ideology. *Post-Islamism: The Changing Faces of Political Islam* edited by Asef Bayat, compiles a group of essays which follow Islamist movements' trajectories and characteristics in several Muslim-majority countries in the Middle East. In the introduction to the book, Bayat addresses the concerns of those who fear the rise of religious parties in the Middle East. He believes that such concerns are closely connected to the mistake of associating anything Islamic with fanaticism, intolerance, and dictatorship. This point of view does not recognize the heterogeneity of Islamic movements and politics. Rather, it groups them into a single, stagnant category. Bayat argues that many of the rising religious parties are misunderstood and represent a "post-Islamist" trend that moves away from an authoritarian manifestation of Islamism towards a more inclusive ideology that upholds human rights and dignity.[87] This is similar to the religious ideology of Esack, Engineer, and Dabashi, but it is important to understand how historical context influences why we find that post-Islamism seems to be more resonant in the Middle East than Islamic liberation theology.

ISLAMISM

In Bayat's view, because historically there have been many interpretations of Islam, we must recognize that the way the faithful articulate their religion depends on the

political, social, economic, and psychological context in which they are situated. One explanation for the rise and dominance of Islamism in the Middle East in the 20th century is that it developed in response to a situation of crisis, namely colonialism. After the age of colonialism, Middle Easterners were left without their own infrastructure and resources, and were mostly stripped of their dignity. This resulted in a movement for authenticity, which was based in Islam because religion was the one of the only power sources to which people could turn in times of crisis. Islamists emerged with the narrative that Muslims had neglected their religion and needed to look to Islam in order to find an authentic way of life and regain dignity.[88] This was accompanied by an intellectual shift in the Middle East towards nationalism, brought on partially by the rejection of western democracy.[89]

To Islamists, finding an authentic way of life meant going straight to God, who exercised ultimate authority and provided laws (*shari'ah*) based on absolute truth. Therefore, Islamism is characterized primarily as an ideology or movement which seeks to establish an Islamic state, with the objectives of securing Islamist power and manifesting Islam as a complete political, social, and economic order. This involves trusting a very small minority of leaders to determine the religious truth that Muslims must live by; ideologically, this is the only way to protect religious interests and create a just society built on Islamic tenets. *Shari'ah* law helps to create this society by enforcing what is considered, by those who monopolize religious truth, to be moral and just by Islam. This kind of state favors obligations over rights and see people as "dutiful subjects" rather than "rightful citizens", and theoretically imposes piety upon them from above.[90]

There are several trends within Islamism that Bayat maps out. The revolutionary/militant trend resorts to violent methods against state agencies, western targets, and non-Muslim civilians in order to seize power and start the Islamization of society from above. Militant Islamists operate solely within specific nation-states, particularly those which are secular. The *jihadi* trend, on the other hand, works at the transnational level and incorporates global ideas. It represents "ethical movements involved in civilization struggles" aiming to bring about the demise of abstract targets such as "the West" and "nonbelievers". The reformist trend, or "Electoral Islamism", is far more moderate, and represents the Islamists who wish to establish an Islamic state gradually and through existing constitutional frameworks. Electoral Islamists attempt to mobilize civil society through professional societies, local mosques, NGOs, and charities, with the hopes of Islamicizing society and creating the perfect conditions for an Islamic state to thrive.[91]

In the second half of the twentieth century, Islamists in the Middle East began to realize the limitations of their ideology as it was experimented with and tested to various extents in certain contexts. In Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, a small minority of Islamists reacted to the consequences of an exclusivist and militant Islamism, while in Iran, Turkey, Lebanon, Egypt, and Morocco, Islamist movements realized that change was necessary as the limitations of their socio-political reality became clear.[92]

In cases when strict *shari'ah* law is implemented through the Islamic state, a closed society is created. This means that society is closed to change and alternative ways of life, to the extent that diversity of mentality is rejected and those who deviate from the norm established through law are punished. By definition, a closed society cannot be

democratic or liberal. Political secularism, where the laws do not stem from religion, is rejected because it is open to difference in mental orientations and thus expresses neutrality towards religion. In Iran, the enforcement of a closed society by the Islamic State resulted in the restriction of rights and imposed upon Muslims a conservative understanding of Islam, which resulted in the people's disillusionment with Islamism.[93] The failure of Islamism within Iran and other countries of the Middle East caused a pragmatic break towards a post-Islamist ideology.

POST-ISLAMISM

Post-Islamism, Bayat argues, must indeed be understood as a break from Islamism. It is not a reformist trend and should not be understood as "Electoral Islamism"; although it is more moderate, it does not advocate for the establishment of an Islamic state.[94] Rather, as a break from Islamism, it represents a "condition" and a "project". Post-Islamism grows from a political and social condition where Islamism's legitimacy has been exhausted and is pressured to reinvent itself. It then becomes a project to transcend and overcome the limitations of Islamism in the social, political, and intellectual domains by "emphasizing rights instead of duties, plurality in place of a single authoritative voice, historicity rather than fixed scripture, and the future instead of the past".[95]

Therefore, instead of favoring an Islamic state, post-Islamism favors a civil non-religious state. The belief that Islamic political values can incorporate principles of modernity and democracy leads post-Islamists away from the desire to use the state to implement a monopolized understanding of Islam. This new political attitude recognized that Islam could be a reference, but that there are a plurality of interpretations. How one

perceives Islam depends on socio-political context, and this means that there exists a difference between true transcendent religion and religiosity within a certain context. Although post-Islamists also believe in an absolute truth, they challenge the Islamists' attempt to monopolize it and condemn claiming power based on sole access to religious understanding. Instead, they embraced values of participation, plurality, and human rights, which meant that the state they support must rely on the will of the people rather than the will of the divine. God is still sovereign in this case, but it is believed that he provides humans with rational thought so that they may establish their own political entity in accordance with his will. Emphasizing rights and participation gives post-Islamists the legitimacy needed for the people to put them in power and allows them to build coalitions with other political and social groups.[96]

Analyzing the ideology of the AKP (Justice and Development) party of Turkey offers a paradigmatic contextual model of how a civil non-religious state would ideally operate. The extreme secularism and authoritarianism of the Kemalist regime has restricted religious freedom in Turkey for decades, to the extent that any Islamist movement must be secretive about any kind of religious agenda and must operate under secular terms and language. After many years, Islamists with the secret ideal of replacing the extreme secular state with an Islamic polity, have had to shift towards post-Islamism and support a more moderate form of secularism in order to survive.

Rather than attempting to replace the Kemalist regime with an Islamic alternative, the AKP has proposed a modern secular state based on democracy, pluralism, and human rights. As opposed to an extreme secularism that restricts religious rights, moderate secularism would be able to create social peace by ensuring freedom of religion and

consciousness. This supports the post-Islamist position that religion can thrive under secularism and democracy in the modern context.[97]

The support of a civil non-religious state does not mean, however, that religion is lost in the break from Islamism to post-Islamism. Post-Islamists still believe that religion can and should have an active role in the public sphere under a secular state. They recognized that religion would flourish in society if those in power embraced secular ideas of plurality and tolerance and promoted liberties inspired by Islamic moral ideals of brotherhood and solidarity. This allows piety to spread among the masses from below, which differs from the Islamist top-down approach of creating piety through shari'a law.[98]

The trend of a piety that is compatible with principles of democracy and modernity is growing thanks to the effects of globalization. Globalization has allowed for modern values like democracy, tolerance, and human rights to have far-reaching influence. The relatively new phenomenon of mass education and media has spread awareness among Muslims concerning the need to reevaluate traditional religious thought through open debate and the relationship between religion and public space. This leads to the rise of a "sense of personalized Muslimhood" which emphasizes personal piety. This kind of religiosity is compatible with a secular democratic state; "democratic values, which form the foundations of practical Islam and the politics of contemporary Muslim society, suggest that being a democratic Muslim is no longer an oxymoron."[99] Post-Islamists realized the need to adapt their religious ideology to cater to this new constituency of democratic Muslims and ensure the survival of political Islam.

CONCLUSION

The disillusionment of Muslims with Islamism coupled with the influence of globalization has fostered the rise of post-Islamism, which Bayat asserts represents a break from Islamism. This break was born of the need to be pragmatic and moderate by modern standards in order to cater to a constituency of "democratic Muslims". This requires that Islamic political values be rethought in order to incorporate those of modernity and democracy. Blending these values successfully means that ideologically post-Islamists are able to work within secular governments and incorporate religion into politics without risking authoritarianism. Because post-Islamism is a relatively new phenomenon in the Middle East, it has yet to be determined how successfully its proponents are able to operate within various contexts, and whether or not they will uphold the ideology they stand behind.

Regardless of this uncertainty, post-Islamism represents a liberal political trend in the Middle East that moves away from an authoritarian manifestation of Islamism towards a more inclusive ideology that upholds human rights and dignity, similar to the religious ideologies of Esack, Engineer, and Dabashi. The next chapter will explore the similarities and differences between the post-Islamism and Islamic liberation theology in order to illuminate the influence context has on religious ideology.

CHAPTER 7: COMPARISON AND ANALYSIS

The main issues that this thesis seeks to address is the reason for the marginal position of Islamic liberation theology within the broad scope of scholarly discussion on modern Islamic thought and why it seems to arise only in non-Muslim majority contexts. Because liberation theology incorporates broad themes of justice, coexistence, and humanity, one might reasonably expect a comparable ideology would be found in Muslim majority countries, especially in the contemporary era. Therefore, this thesis hopes to explore what alternative to Islamic liberation theology can be found, particularly in the Middle East, by making comparing its ideological values to those of an alternative. The alternative in this case is post-Islamism.

Analyzing the reason for similarities and differences between Islamic liberation theology and post-Islamism highlights how much context plays a part in their origin, development, and the characteristics of their core ideological values. A natural outcome of this analysis is to explore the relationship between context and religiosity, as both Islamic liberation theologians and post-Islamists grapple with Islam's place in the modern world and how religion can give meaning to their lives.

It can be argued that Islamic liberation theology in general originates within a certain type of context; Engineer and Esack's liberation theologies are both born of the struggle against oppression in non-Muslim majority countries and are responses to the injustice Muslims experienced due to their minority status. In India, Muslims were placed extremely low in the caste system and suffered as a result of the conflict created by religious elites, and in South Africa, Muslims (especially those who were black) were victims of apartheid, which was enforced by whites and often justified through an

exclusivist interpretation of Christianity. Islamic liberation theology arose in the midst of the struggle to combat these oppressions that kept Muslims at the margins of society. As a "second act", liberation theology is contextual by nature and cannot be separated from the oppression it seeks to overcome. Without the oppression that Esack and Engineer experienced as Muslim minorities, there would have been no need for the liberation theologies they developed as a way to reflect on their struggle.

Because Esack and Engineer lived in non-Muslim majority countries and interacted daily with the religious other, the liberation theologies they developed in response to oppression incorporated a theology of pluralism. While Engineer called for active dialogue between religious peoples in order to end religious conflict, Esack realized that interfaith solidarity was essential in the fight against apartheid. Although Dabashi's work does not fit within the borders of a specific country, in the global context where there is no majority he called for an international dialogue that realistically recognized the legitimacy of all religions. Their support for pluralism went hand in hand with the idea that the struggle against oppression was continuous and constantly strived towards total equality and comprehensive justice. Ideologically, if Muslims ignored the rights of non-Muslims, they would risk becoming oppressors themselves and offending God's will for equality. In a pragmatic sense, solidarity with the religious other was the only option in a non-Muslim majority; Muslims as the minority would never be able to rise up on their own against the forces of oppression that dominated the social, economic, and political spheres.

Although they resided in non-Muslim majority countries, the liberation theologians were aware of other Islamic theologies and the various traditions of Islam

worldwide through study in seminaries and secular universities. This allowed them to juxtapose their Islamic liberation theologies with the traditional theology that fueled fundamentalism, or religious revivalism as Charles Kurzman calls it. In fact, Islamic liberation theology depends largely on the rejection of traditional theology, as it embodies an interpretation of Islam that perpetuates or leads to the kind of oppression that must be abolished. Religious exclusivism, monopolization of "truth", support for an Islamic State, and an ahistorical view of Islam, were just a few of the fundamentalist ideals that did not make sense in the context of a non-Muslim majority and were not conducive to the struggle for justice.

Post-Islamists also reject fundamentalism but essentially learned to do so the hard way over a long period of time. As their designation suggests, they had moved on from the ideology that fueled Islamism because it lost legitimacy. In order to remain relevant, expressions of political Islam had to adapt with time. Islamism in the Middle East was initially a reaction to colonialism and an attempt to achieve an authentic way of life in the shadow of a modernity that crushed Middle Easterners' dignity. It survived because it was needed and was conceived in the context of a Muslim majority, where its audience was comprised of people who already had faith in Islam and found authority in it. This does not mean that the fundamentalist ideology cannot exist in the context of non-Muslim majority areas. In fact, Engineer encountered it through his experience with the Indian *ulama.* However, it could find more resonance within a Muslim majority context and therefore experience greater success in actualizing its political goals.

Dabashi asserted that the Islamism of the Middle East was justified in its historical context and that its ideology made sense in a climate where intellectuals were

rejecting western modernity and imperialism in favor of nationalism and socialism. This reveals that Islamism can also be seen as the rejection of oppression (colonialism and imperialism), as is liberation theology. However, because Islamism grew in a context where ideas of nationalism flourished, it took on an authoritarian nature and believed the best way to implement God's will of justice was through the apparatus of the state. Over time, this ideology was exhausted. The political climate of the Middle East has changed, the true colors of Islamism have been revealed (largely, but not exclusively, through the example of the Iranian Islamic State), and globalization has spread modern values of democracy and tolerance through mass education and media. Post-Islamists are aware of these modern needs and values and have adapted to incorporate them into their ideology in order to remain relevant and gain the support of constituents who will keep them in power. As Asef Bayat states, post-Islamism represents a break from Islamism despite growing out of it, and attempts to rethink the way Islam is incorporated into politics. It is plausible to claim that because of its connection to Islamism, which largely is fostered best by the conditions of a Muslim majority context, post-Islamism is likewise connected to Muslim majority context.

This means post-Islamism shares a something with Islamic liberation theology; they similarly define themselves by their relationship with fundamentalism and the rejection of its ideology. Rejecting exclusivism and the authoritarian nature of fundamentalism, post-Islamists and liberation theologians believe that there is a difference between the true form of religion as God intended it and religiosity, or the way religion is manifested in the world. Monopolization of religious truth leads to tyranny and assumes the authority of God, especially when it comes to attempting to enforce that

"truth" on others through the state. Because humans are fallible, the practice of religion is always imperfect and never monolithic. Despite this, there are ways of staying true to God's will, through tools like hermeneutics, or through finding the value in pluralism and engaging in critical reflection and dialogue. It is important to remember that the reasons they reject Islamism differ due to context. In the context of a Muslim majority that has recently come to support the values of democracy and modernity, post-Islamism is subsequent to Islamism and rejects it out of pragmatism, while in the context of religious diversity and marginalization Islamism is the antithesis of liberation theology and cannot be accommodated in the struggle against injustice.

The religious ideologies of Islamic liberation theology and post-Islamism both incorporate similar values of tolerance and human rights because they are both products of modernity. In the political sphere, this translates to a shared support for democratic institutions and secular polities that allow for freedom of thought and religious diversity. As with the rejection of fundamentalism, the motivations for incorporating these values into their ideologies differ. In the case of liberation theology, the initial reflexive reaction against oppression and the subsequent struggle against it are supported by the modern values of human rights and equality. Post-Islamists, on the other hand, are motivated primarily out of pragmatism and the need to break away from Islamism, whose ideology does not mesh with modern values. In order to ensure survival, post-Islamists need to cater to a modern audience whose religiosity is compatible with democratic values. This does not imply that post-Islamists cannot be committed to their ideology, but simply recognizes a pragmatic break from Islamism as part of their history and identity.

When one takes a step back, a comparison between post-Islamism and Islamic liberation theology may seem improper because they are motivated in different ways, serve different purposes, and fill different roles in the public domain. Post-Islamism is an attempt to bring together religion and politics that is expressed through the work of political parties and participation in modern government, and is pragmatically concerned with ensuring its own political survival. Islamic liberation theology happens among lay people and academic intellectual activists and responds to oppression while keeping Muslims in alignment with God's will in their struggle to create justice for all human beings.

These differences can be explained by the influence of context. Although the religious ideologies look similar, they have different goals based on the circumstances under which they operate. Post-Islamists are able to participate in government because they come from a tradition of Islamism, which has paved the way for them in terms of introducing the incorporation of Islam into politics. Also, the very idea that Islam and politics can be mixed is more likely to become manifest in the context of a Muslim majority where it would have greater legitimacy. Over time, the pressure of adapting to the values of a modern world caused the break from Islamism to post-Islamism; in order to survive, political Islam had to incorporate liberal ideals and work from a more liberal perspective. A liberal ideology is put to work in order to cater to the needs of a modern Muslim constituency. Islamic liberation theology, on the other hand, comes from a point of marginalization, where Muslims do not have the opportunity to act as full humans within society and are denied an equal voice in the political world. In this case, a liberal religious ideology serves a different purpose and fuels the fight against oppression.

CONCLUSION

The rise of liberal Islam, as described by Kurzman, combined with the influence of Gutiérrez and religious and modern secular education, led Farid Esack and Ashgar Ali Engineer to develop their own Islamic liberation theologies at the end of the 20th century. Their theologies cannot be separated from context and would have no meaning without the oppression to which they reacted and sought to overcome. This thesis argues that although Islamic liberation theology so far comes only from non-Muslim majorities, similar religious ideologies must be found in Muslim majorities because of its incorporation of Islamic values and widespread modern values like human rights and equality. The alternative that is explored is post-Islamism, which shares similar values despite several differences. The differences between post-Islamism and Islamic liberation theology can be explained by the influence that context has on the manifestation of their ideologies and how these ideologies even came to be.

The liberation theology of Esack and Engineer could not have happened in the Middle East because they were born of the context where Muslims were oppressed due to their minority status and religious differences. The oppression that Dabashi speaks of is analogous to this situation. Although the Muslims to which he refers reside mostly in the Middle East, the context that Dabashi is concerned with is the greater global community which is victimized by the United States. This a community in which Muslims of the Middle East are only a fraction of the whole. In all three situations, abolishing oppression is crucial, and it becomes imperative under this circumstance that any Islamic theology must be oriented towards liberation. In their struggle, Muslims must learn to coexist and

engage in dialogue with the religious other in order to be prosperous and uphold values of true equality and justice.

Although the religious ideology of Islamic liberation theology indeed resonates with Muslims in Muslim majority nations, it is not so pressing for these Muslims to orient themselves towards liberation. Thus, a similar ideology is manifested in the form of what Asef Bayat calls "post-Islamism". In some ways, post-Islamists live in a climate where they are given more opportunities for participation and Islam enjoys greater legitimacy (although some, depending on the country in which they operate, are still fighting for greater recognition and participation). On the other hand, those engaging with liberation theology are treated as non-humans by those who hold power over them. These differences are reflected in the way their religious ideologies are translated into action. In some cases, post-Islamists are able to push for equality through government participation and the passing of laws; those engaging with liberation theology must struggle in the fight to end oppression before they can enjoy the same privileges as post-Islamists. This shows the effect context has on religiosity. Although they grow out of similar values, these religious ideologies serve different purposes due to the needs of Muslims and the influence of historical context.

Based on the arguments made above, although both ideologies are products of modernity, the conditions required for the development of Islamic liberation theology are found in non-Muslim majority contexts where Muslims experience oppression as a result of their minority status, and the conditions required for the development of post-Islamism are found in Muslim majority contexts where its predecessor, Islamism is allowed to flourish.

In light of this argument and others that have been made throughout the course of this thesis, there are several caveats that deserve attention. Although this thesis argues that post-Islamism is more likely to arise in Muslim majority contexts, this does not go so far to claim that it cannot and does not happen in non-Muslim majority countries, nor does it suggest the same about liberation theology in relation to Muslim majority countries. As Robert McAfee Brown was quoted as saying in Chapter 3, "liberation theology exists wherever there is oppression" and wherever strides towards liberation and the end of injustice are being made worldwide.[100]

Something else that sticks out is the importance Islamic liberation theologians give to a pluralistic society for realizing their goals. This paper argues that an Islamic liberation theology which incorporates a theology of pluralism is most likely to arise in non-Muslim majorities because the need for coexistence is more obvious and crucial in the struggle for justice. This does not mean to imply that pluralism does not exist in Muslim majority countries; the word "majority" even implies that there must be a minority. The minority in Muslim majority countries are indeed made up of the religious other; Christians, Jews, Copts, Bahá'ís, Druze, and so on. The need for coexistence is also important in the Middle East, and the element of post-Islamist ideology that supports human rights would ideally uphold this. However because post-Islamism is a relatively new phenomenon and political processes are less immediate than the pressing struggle for liberation, it remains to be seen how post-Islamists deal with the religious other in reality.

 Further research concerning the marginality of Islamic liberation theology and its ideological alternative is needed. The focus on post-Islamism as the ideological sibling of Islamic liberation theology does not mean that another does not exist. If one wishes to

pursue further study of Islamic liberation theology, it is worth looking into what some have called the liberation theology of Muhammad al-Fasi of Morocco and Ali Shariati of Iran. They were not included in this work because they do not identify what they do as Islamic liberation theology, as do Engineer, Esack, and Dabashi. Due to time constraints, further research could not be done, but it would be interesting to know how these leads affect this thesis.

However, based on the scholarship we examined in this paper and the marginal position of Islamic liberation theology, we can draw certain conclusions in this thesis. Historical context has great influence on the formation of religious ideology and the way it is realized. Despite sharing similar values, liberation theologians and post-Islamists are motivated differently and contextual circumstances affect the ways in which they can realize their ideologies. Post-Islamists are motivated by the need to remain politically relevant in Muslim majority countries, and as a result bring modern and Islamic values together in a party platform that drives political activity. Islamic liberation theologians are motivated by the need to fight oppression in contexts of non-Muslim majorities, and they engage in a liberation struggle that utilizes the Qur'an.

Both Islamic liberation theology and post-Islamism represent ways of determining the appropriate role and relevance of religion in the modern context. In this process, their proponents argue that many modern values are compatible with God's will because they support the cause of justice and equality. Although the expression of religiosity differs between them due to the influence of historical context, liberation theologians and post-Islamists are both able to come to the conclusion that Islam has meaning in the modern world and can undoubtedly foster change.

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