

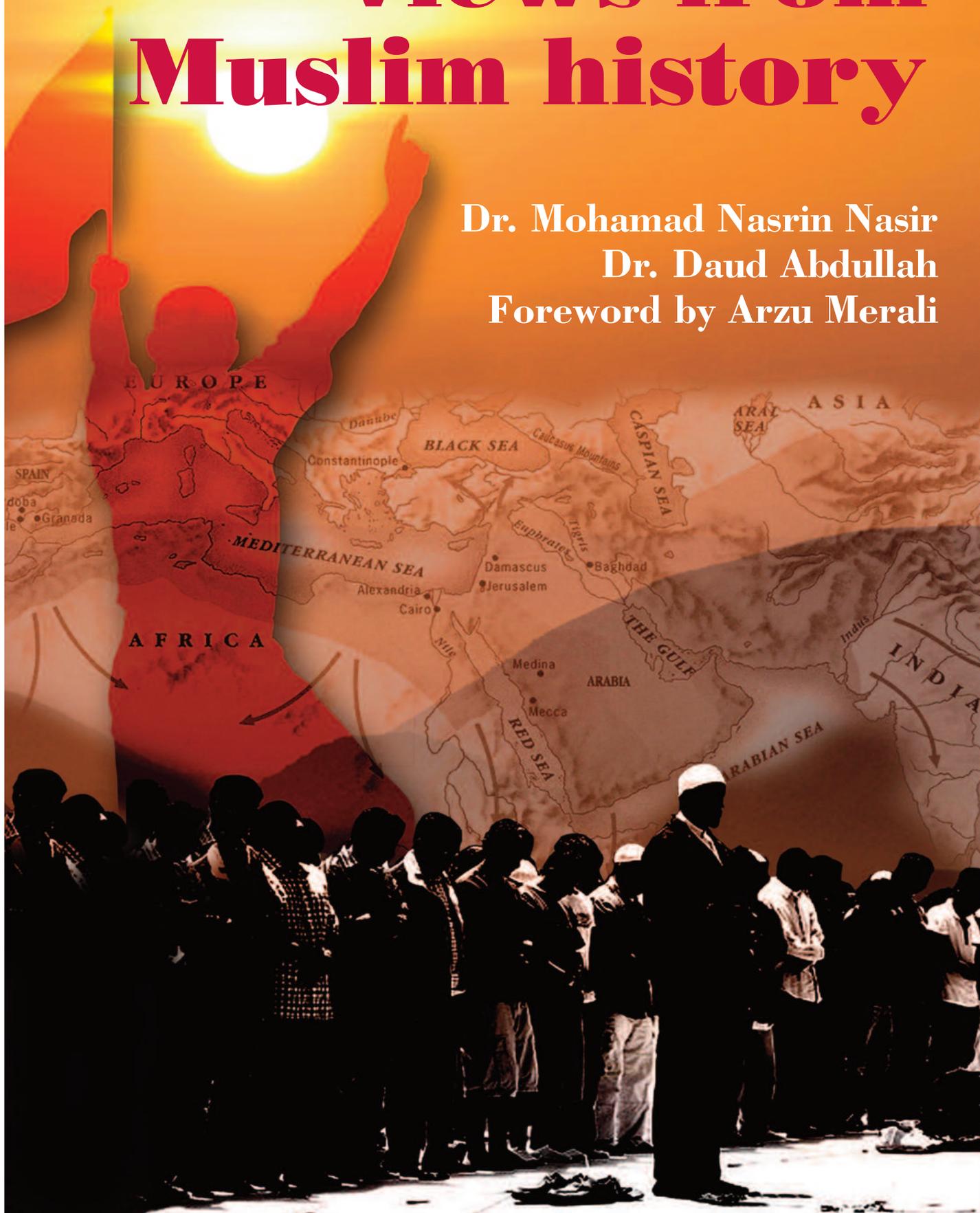
THE UNIVERSAL THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION:

Views from Muslim history

Dr. Mohamad Nasrin Nasir

Dr. Daud Abdullah

Foreword by Arzu Merali



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Foreword

As this publication goes to print, revolution is sweeping the Middle East and North Africa. Millions have taken to the streets in Tunisia to topple its longstanding dictator Zine El Abidine.

A million more have stood in Tahrir Square, Cairo, and hundreds of thousands more have taken to the streets of Alexandria, Suez and all over Egypt in order to bring down Hosni Muabark, and equally hated President. Jordan, Yemen and Syria have felt the pressure too.

As the oppressors fall, their erstwhile supporters flag up the horror of a possible future for the region, dominated by Islamists. A poorly informed, structurally biased mainstream media, parrots the line that the involvement of 'Islam inspired' groups is a bad thing. The papers presented here, were first submitted to the seminar 'The Universal Theology of Liberation: Views from Muslim history, held in July 2009. Their content bears directly on exactly the current debate regarding – and demonization of – Islamic movements in political and social struggles.

Mohamad Nasrin Nasir looks to North Africa and the example of 19th century *mujahid* Amir Abdul Kadir's struggle against the French in Algeria. He overviews the theoretical works of Professor Saied Reza Ameli, Ali Asghar Engineer, Jalaluddin Al-Afghani to highlight the fusion of faith with political struggle – for the betterment of all. The term liberation theology was coined in the last century to refer to the theological underpinning of Christian inspired and led struggles for liberation from social and political oppression – from poverty to political disenfranchisement. What is sometimes forgotten is that these movements, particularly in the South American context identified often with armed struggles or were if not militarised in themselves, were supportive of armed resistance movements. They were the very epitome of the word 'radical' as used today to demean Islamically inspired movements. This in and of itself is enough reason to view current movements that use the 'Islam' label through similar criteria of analysis – be the outcome critical, condemnatory – or as is the case with many peoples in the developing worlds – a congratulatory light. This does not mean we uncritically accept all who claim the title *mujahid* as hero, but it also means we can accept that heroes do exist and demand to be understood as fighters for a universal justice and not simply as a cartoonish demon to suit a particularist and chauvinistic vision.

Daud Abdullah's submission charts a historical track and argues that the resurgence of Islam led political movements in Palestine has a respectable and longstanding history. Where the Hamas and Islamic Jihad movements have often been targeted for their Islamic identity, Abdullah argues that their role in the political life of Palestine both under occupation and Godwilling under a free state, is intrinsic to its wellbeing.

These papers do not seek to whitewash legitimate questions about the parameters of political and social struggle – they do demand that when judging all political and social struggles, we need to look beyond the easy and lazy stereotypes that have become the norm in our stale political cultures. They also provide analyses of the positive – they humanise those movements which are ultimately so meaningful to oppressed peoples world-wide and whose humanity demands recognition.

Without such recognition we are all doomed.

Arzu Merali,
Islamic Human Rights Commission, February 2011

Universal theology of liberation: views from Muslim history

Dr. Mohamad Nasrin Nasir

Muslim writings in regards to Liberation Theology are still very scarce and hard to find. Few scholars have talked about the issue from their own particular specialised perspective. This methodological difficulty was solved through an acquaintance with the writings of al-Afghani, Asghar, Hasan Hanafi and Saied Ameli.

It has come to my understanding that an acceptable definition of Liberation Theology is needed when conducting this research. This would be the methodological pivot for the study upon which the entire research can be based. Definitions depend upon the environment in which a particular concept had been used. In Esack and Hanafi they might be different in their conceptual understanding of Liberation Theology, but as we shall see there are many common trends between them. The most significant would be inter-religious dialogue which is quite strong within their discussion of the scope of their Liberation Theology. This may form a part of the definition of Liberation Theology. My aim is that at the end of this paper we would be able to consolidate a meaning of Islamic Liberation Theology which we can apply to situations within Muslim lands.

Liberate – free from oppressive social conventions

Revive – come or bring back to consciousness

Revival – reawakening of religious fervour

Muslim movements have always been labelled as revivalist movements or resurgence movements, very rarely in today's world are they seen as liberating movements. Liberating movements against oppression can be linked to movements against colonialism, against oppressive regimes or simply their policies. Liberating i.e. to be free from oppressive social conventions would encompass these movements. As we are trying to find a concept of Islamic Liberation Theology, we would have to selectively choose the movements or figures involved in these issues.

My choice of figures here are mainly due to their works, which would enable me to assess their usage of concepts, jurisprudential tools etc. in justifying their liberating theology which would enable the people to accept them. Within Islam there is a vast array of tools used by liberating figures in their writings to form ideological constructs for their followers to hold on to.

Ideas on liberation

(i) Discussion on liberation mainly falls into these divisions:

liberation from a foreign power or occupier of Muslim lands through applications of universal values as seen through Islamic theology;

(ii) liberation of Muslim minds from old ways of thinking towards embracing modernity (science and technology) for the sake of progress e.g. Afghani, Tahtawi, Rahman;

(iii) liberation of Muslim minds from old ways of thinking towards developing a new theology for the revival of the Muslims e.g. Hassan Hanafi.

When the word liberate is used it is always in contrast to something which is already there; in the case of thought there has to exist a former structure of thought which this new idea is trying to displace or to liberate.

Our intention in this paper is to investigate these various approaches towards the issue of liberation and see how Islamic theology is used to justify such liberation movements within Islam. So in a sense this paper is a theory based paper with discussions connected with the philosophy of Islam or its worldview.

What do we mean by theology? Theology is the idea expressed from a particular angle (which defines its framework of investigation) which has to do with God and the needs and aims of religion.

Thus when we say 'Liberation Theology' what we mean by the term is the explanation of a movement of liberation from the angle of theology. That theology may or may not have anything to do with pure *kalam* or Islamic theology but has a lot to do with what and how the idea of liberation is connected with the aims of Islam or the Muslim community as it is understood by different Muslim thinkers.

As such the discussion here might relate necessarily or not with the discussion on Muslim revivalism i.e. the idea of regaining the strength of Islam. These liberation ideas in Islam are primarily designed and propagated by its proponents with the aim of regaining some sort of utopian or ideal Islamic society which was once a primary characteristic of Islamic civilisation.

This paper is unique for the terms that are studied are terms rooted in the Western consciousness and do not have direct equivalents in the language of Islam i.e. Arabic. I do not mean that the word liberation does not exist in Arabic but what I mean is that liberation as it is used in the three divisions above does not exist in a singular word as it is used in Arabic language.

- **Al-Afghani (19th century)**

Ideas on liberation entered Muslim consciousness during the colonisation period. We find Muslim scholars had to resort to defensive *jihad* in order to feign off the colonial powers. Muslim thinkers started to think on how to regain back their civilisation. The golden Islamic era, which is normally attributed to the time of the Abbasids, was the rallying point for many Muslim thinkers, most notably Jamaluddin al-Afghani. He rallied the Muslims against stagnant ways of thinking.

Afghani with his follower Muhammad Abduh started to awaken the Muslim world regarding the evil of the West in general and the British in particular through their newspaper *al-urwathul wuthqa*. Afghani also paid particular attention to educating the Muslim masses and intellectuals regarding the glory of the Muslim past. He probably intended to counter the awe of the Muslim intellectuals at the time towards Western progress. Regarding modern science, he hinted that by understanding philosophy and putting it into practice Muslims would be able to have progress in science.

To Afghani, as with most Muslim revivalists of the era, Islam was once the strongest power in the world and it was due to internal weaknesses that the Muslim world had become subjugated to its enemies. One of the reasons for this was due to rivalries and internal discord with fellow Muslims that finally resulted in disunity, corruption and greed.¹

He further gave the example of the Russians who, due to their spirit of co-operation between themselves, have now achieved success. The Muslims could defend themselves from attack from Western countries if they were united and formed a union of Muslim states. He pointed out the enemies of unity as, *'those local rulers who were steeped in their own daily pleasures and honour'*².

In order to overcome this, he suggested that the Muslim masses rise up and be united under the banner of Qur'an and Islam which would lead them to success.³

He showed apt wisdom and wit in responding to criticism towards Islam. In his response to Renan against the accusation that Islam is not compatible with science, instead of taking the well rehearsed defensive route preferred by most contemporary Muslim thinkers, Afghani actually agreed with Renan.⁴ After praising Renan as being the greatest thinker of the time, he writes:

"If it is true that the Muslim religion is an obstacle to the development of sciences, can one affirm that this obstacle will not disappear someday? All religions are intolerant, each one in its own way. The Christian religion, I mean the society that follows its inspirations and its teachings and is formed in its image has emerged from the first period to which I have alluded; thenceforth free and independent, it seems to advance rapidly on the road of progress and science, whereas Muslim society has not yet freed itself from the tutelage of religion."

Optimistically he continues to have hope as he further writes:

“..the Christian religion preceded the Muslim religion in the world by many centuries, I cannot keep from hoping that Muhammadan society will succeed someday in breaking its bonds and marching resolutely in the path of civilisation after the manner of western society, for which the Christian faith despite its rigors and intolerance, was not at all an invincible obstacle.

“In truth the Muslim religion has tried to stifle science and stop its progress. It has thus succeeded in halting the philosophical or the intellectual movement and in turning minds from the search for scientific truth...”

This characteristically shows Afghani’s understanding of why Muslims are in the backward position if compared to the Western world. He championed this thought especially when speaking to learned audiences in India and in Turkey.

He would always remind the Muslims that they should revive philosophy in their teaching in order to reach ‘*the state of external beings, their causes, reasons, needs and requisites*’⁵. Is it enough to just quote the philosophers and their books? No, as Afghani goes further when he says that the Muslim intellectuals should even question those authorities when studying them. He does not believe in blind imitation and criticises those scholars in a speech he gave in front of an audience in Albert Hall, Calcutta:

“It is strange that our ulama read Sadra and *Shams al baria* and vaingloriously call themselves sages and despite this they cannot distinguish their left hand from their right hand, and they do not ask: Who are we and what is right and proper for us? They never ask the causes of electricity, the steamboat and railroads.”⁶

Afghani is hinting towards ideas of liberating Muslim thought from the strictures and structures of traditional imitation (taqlidi) learning. To him the advancement of philosophy should bring with it the advancement of sciences if the ulema had not been blind imitators of the past masters or sages.

He says that this is the reason that these scholars forbid people from studying the sciences. To him:

“Science is that noble thing that has no connection with any nation and is not distinguished by anything but itself. Rather, everything that is known is known by science and every nation that becomes renowned becomes renowned by science. Men must be related to science, not science to men”⁷

He further criticises those Muslims who allow others to study Aristotle as if they were Muslims and forbid the study of today's modern thinkers like Galileo, Newton and Kepler due to them being infidels. To Afghani, there should not be any limits whatsoever in studying these new thinkers of the modern world and analysing their ideas. He does not mean that by studying these thinkers Muslims should adopt any ideas per se, instead he wants to encourage the analytical thinking amongst Muslim thinkers. He sees these as being the prerequisites for building an Islamic civilisation that is capable of confronting the West.

Afghani's idea of liberation then comes from his deep understanding in the strength and vitality of Islam that unfortunately is not followed by its adherents. Afghani was writing in the 19th century and of course much has happened since then. Nevertheless Afghani can be counted as one of the earliest Muslim thinkers who had raised such views.

• Hasan Hanafi (Egyptian thinker and philosopher)

Hanafi is a notable philosopher and Professor at Cairo University in Egypt who had made Liberation Theology his main project in reinterpreting the *turath* or Muslim heritage with the aim of influencing the Muslim masses to reject blind emulation (*taqlid*) of the past eras. His work can be seen as continuing Afghani's ideas above, although in a more nuanced manner.

His aim is of course towards producing a more vibrant and strong *ummah*. Unlike Ameli, who we shall see later explains Muslim movements against secularism and globalisation as driven by Liberation Theology, Hanafi is interested in bringing Liberation Theology into his project of liberating Muslim consciousness and thought from old theories. Whereas Ameli's work can be seen to be cautious with modernity, Hanafi's work wants to liberate Islam from traditional tendencies and embrace modernity.

However he still believes that establishment of justice, fairness and implementation of God's rule on earth are the main components within Liberation Theology.

Quoted from Paul Knitter:

"Liberation theology is a general foundation between all religions and it is a liberation tool for everyone by which implementation of God's rule on earth, establishment of justice, equal rights and uplifting people's level of living can come true."⁸

Liberation theology according to Hanafi is not a sectarian wish but rather it is a very clear intention towards prosperity for all.

Therefore it is not a religious liberation but more than that it is liberation for all of mankind. It is therefore not a new theology but a new approach or attitude towards life.

Liberation theology is thus inclusive of all religions and would also lead towards inter-religious dialogue. Hanafi, who is an expert on Islamic theology, regards Islamic theology to be an inclusive ideology of all faiths and good for mankind.

He then dwells more into the issue of religious dialogue and asserts that there are 5 main paradigms under which religious dialogues usually happen. They are:

Resistant paradigm

Lower paradigm

Outer / above paradigm

Togetherness paradigm

Liberation theology paradigm

Of all the paradigms outlined above, it is the Liberation Theology paradigm that is the biggest contributor towards inter-religious dialogue according to Hanafi.

Liberation theology gives absolute priority towards praxis over theory. It normally takes the side of the oppressed rather than the oppressor. It is a part of the socio-political resistance against the world. It is not a new theology, however it is aimed at implementing a new world in reality. It does not prefer one religion over the other; orthopraxis is better than orthodoxy.

Liberation theology is first of all a liberation from theology i.e. the priority of its own teachings. Secondly it is a liberation through theology.

Liberation theology thus is a tool at the hands of Hassan Hanafi with the intention of liberating Islam from all authoritative readings of its sources. The aim is clear once Islam is liberated from the various authoritarian interpretations which lead to ideology then Islam can be redesigned to take up the challenge of modernity. One question that can be asked of Hanafi is that whether breaking these authoritarian interpretations is necessary to revive Islam and its civilisation? Why do we have to use modern methods of style and enquiry to revive Islam?

• **Asghar Ali Engineer – The Prophetic model of Liberation Theology**

Since the coming of Islam to Arabia, Islam has not failed to impress upon its followers the idea of liberation. Initially the liberation of faith from all that is false and later the liberation of Arabia from oppressive forces of the pagan Arab aristocracy. This idea has been studied fully and explicated cogently by Asghar Ali Engineer's paper (whose details are found in the bibliography section of this paper).

According to Asghar, the Islamic faith was a force of liberation and has some main concepts within the theory of liberation. They are: social liberation, economic justice and tolerance towards other religions.

By social liberation Asghar means that the Islamic message had come to liberate people from the mindsets which are coloured by race, colour of the skin etc. This would also include equal rights for women as proposed by Islam and shown through the Prophet's practice and actions. Islam is also against *zulm* as Asghar had quoted from [4:75]⁹ and [28:5]¹⁰. In fact, according to Asghar these two verses, as well as others, are indicators that the Qur'an is a charter of liberation for the oppressed.

Economic justice would mean distributive justice in the economic sense. The Qur'an prohibits usury and the hoarding of wealth as these are deemed to be oppressive towards the poor.

Tolerance is a clear message from the Qur'an of which Asghar quotes and explains. However it was due to governance of Islam under the Umayyads that Islam lost its democratic and liberative character:

"Now the Umayyad emperors gathered powerful tyrants and oppressors around them and ruthlessly suppressed all those who challenged their oppressive rule. The number of slaves multiplied, women subjugated and confined to harems, female slaves sexually abused, non-Arabs discriminated against and liberative teachings of Islam replaced by fatalistic outlook. Dogma of *Jabr* (determinism fatalism) was actively propagated and that of *gadr* (freedom to act) was suppressed. After development of monarchy feudal values became supreme. Power hierarchy developed, socio-political equality was lost and equality confined only to the lines of prayers in the mosque, women came to be completely subjugated and their social status was very much eroded and Arab domination established firmly".

The faith of Islam cannot but be a liberating force.

Is this Liberation Theology in Islam similar to the South American Churches whose leader can be seen in the figure of Gustavo Gutierrez? Ameli has an answer to this question.

• **Ameli – Islam as Liberation Theology against secularisation and globalisation as a consequence of modernity**

Liberation theology is a response towards the situation the Muslims find themselves in:

"Liberation theology is a response towards two important local and global nostalgias; the first and the most important one is nostalgia for justice and the second one is nostalgia of metaphysical values, both of which are universal values and have strong potential for turning any social action into universal practice."¹¹

Ameli contends that Liberation Theology, which is discussed a lot more in the Christian world, can actually be universalised if the ideology fulfils three conditions.

First, the return to God, which has two aspects within it: the conscious attention given to God and the universality of the perception of God that has within it the idea that no differences exist amongst people of differing religions save their closeness to Him. This should generate a return to that source of pure light to extinguish one's sin. This return has political ramifications in that it desecularises contemporary religious discourse and repoliticises it. Thus the influence of religion is made to reach the political aspects of human life.

The second condition is selflessness, at whose centre lies the concept of sacrifice. It simply means all becomes equal to one and one becomes equal to all. This condition is necessary for universality to happen.

Third is the centrality of Justice within the particular ideology. Ameli stresses the centrality of this concept within all religions, that religions cannot exist without this concept and that religious orders are nothing but a just order for human beings¹².

These three concepts are used by Ameli to explain the issue of the Palestinian people seeking their rights and their lands indicating their cause as an example of Liberation Theology¹³.

After reviewing the above discussions on Liberation Theology as it is amongst Muslim thinkers, it is obvious that the last discussion by Ameli is more pertinent to our purpose today. Using Ameli's definition of Liberation Theology I will now seek to discuss a Muslim movement against colonialists led by Amir Abd al-Qadir. My attempt here is to illustrate the usage of an interpretation of Liberation Theology in the resistance movement here. This is done through recourse to the writings of the leader of this movement i.e. Amir Abd al-Qadir.

• Amir Abd al-Qadir (d.1883)

Amir Abd al-Qadir was the leader of the Algerian resistance movement to French colonialism in the 19th century. His movement managed, successfully, for a limited period, to defeat the French and ruled much of Algeria for seven long years (1832-9) before he was forced to surrender to the French. This was due to the change of heart of the Sultan Abd al-Rahman of Morocco who was until then a loyal supporter of Abd al-Qadir. Due to immense pressure from the French, he stopped all military aid to the Amir in 1844.¹⁴ He would then become a bitter enemy to Abd al-Qadir when he commanded his nephew to lead an army against Abd al-Qadir in 1847. The Amir by then was stationed in a Da'irah in Morocco and managed to defeat the army, however a more powerful force was sent by the Sultan to crush Abd al-Qadir. Faced with the Moroccan onslaught and French hostilities preventing him from returning to Algeria, Abd al-Qadir opted to surrender to General de Lamoriciere on 21st December 1847.¹⁵

Although Abd al-Qadir was offered an amnesty initially by the General in the terms of his surrender, the French government later imprisoned him from 1848-1852. Upon release, he requested that he be allowed to live in Damascus. He led a life of a Muslim saint which was full of teaching and medicating those infected with numerous illnesses. He passed away on the

26th of May 1883 and was buried next to his spiritual mentor the great Shaykh al-Akbar Ibn al-'Arabi in Damascus. In the 1960s, his body was brought home to Algeria where he was given a state burial and since then has been regarded as one of Algeria's national heroes. The Amir encapsulated the ideal Muslim leader, pious, scholarly, brave and courageous as well as a good tactician. In this section, as we are discussing Liberation Theology, I shall quote from the Amir's works his views on the three aspects of Liberation Theology i.e. (i) return to God; (ii) selflessness and; (iii) centrality of justice in resistance.

(i) Return to God

"Oh, you who believe! Fear Allah, and seek a means of access to Him, and struggle on His way; perhaps you will succeed! (Koran 5:35)

Commentary: ... God commands believers to practice the fear of Him. This corresponds to what is called... the "station of repentance" which is the basis of all progress on the Way and the key which permits one to arrive at the "station of realization"..."¹⁶

The statement mentioned here demonstrates the idea of returning to God and striving in His path towards achieving realisation. Realisation here most probably means the realisation of human beings' indebtedness to God for bringing him / her into existence as well as realising or becoming and fulfilling the potential of a human being. This is the way that is mentioned here. As someone who is spiritually inclined, Abd al-Qadir believes that all human beings are in a movement towards their God and in order to succeed in this movement Muslims are to practice fear of God and always remain in constant remembrance of Him in all aspects of their life. This station of repentance is the station of returning to God for repentance, which is *tauba* in Arabic, coming from the word *taba-yatubu* which means to return. Thus in all aspects of life Muslims are to return to Him and this return can only happen if we practice fear of God. Fear means to believe that we are weak and without the help of another who is stronger than us we would perish. This fear is taken in the positive light here and that because God is the most able and strongest, thus by fearing Allah we are actually returning to Him who is the source of all strength. Only when we realise that we are weak and in constant need for a stronger entity will we be able to constantly refer to Him in all our daily practices.

(ii) Selflessness

Selflessness means the love for all regardless of their religion, race or even political allegiances. Love for all constitutes a major element in Abd al-Qadir's liberative movement. This can be seen in his statement:

"The pleasure and the love of God for His creatures constitute the original state. His pleasure and love are the means by which He has brought His creatures into existence and are the cause of that bringing into existence. He who knows that he possesses neither being nor act rediscovers himself in that original state of pleasure and divine love."

Why is it that we are told to love for all? The answer resides in the statement quoted here, because God loves all His creatures. In fact Abd al-Qadir says that it is because of God's love of His creatures that He brought the creatures into existence in the first place. If we understand this we would be able to bask in this Divine love and love all.

Furthermore Abd al-Qadir says:

“God said, “Whoever hopes to encounter his Lord, let him do pious works and, in the adoration of his Lord, not associate any being with Him.” (Koran 18:110) The things which I have mentioned are the “beings” which are associated with God. Now, God is, of all those that are associated in adoration, the One who absolutely transcends all association. That is why He prescribed to all His servants that they adore Him with a perfectly pure faith which implies the desire for no other recompense than His face... ”

All pious works that we do must be done in the spirit of adoring and loving God and realise that we seek none other but to meet with His face.

The face of God is everywhere as Abd al-Qadir says:

“And He is with you wherever you are ... (Koran 57:4)

Commentary: ... The companionship expressed by “with” is that of the Being and the non-being, for there is no Being other than Allah...”

So how can it be that we are separated from God when He is everywhere?

He explains further:

“If Allah — May He be exalted! — was not, by His very Essence, which is the Being of all that is, “with” the creatures, we could not attribute being to any of these creatures and they could not be perceived either by the senses, by the imagination, or by the intellect. It is their ‘being with’ which assures to creatures a relation with Being. Better yet, it is their being itself. This ‘being with’ embraces all things, whether they are sublime or lowly, great or small. It is through it that they subsist. He is the pure Being by which ‘that which is’ is. The ‘being with’ of Allah consists therefore in the fact that He is with us through His essence; that is, through that which we call the divine Self (*huwiyya*), universally present ...

“Indications of this divine ‘being with’ are contained in the following verses:

“And He is witness of all things (Koran 34:47)

“And Allah, behind them, encompasses them (Koran 85:20)

“Wherever you turn, there is the Face of Allah (Koran 2:116).”

This demonstrates Abd al-Qadir’s definition of selflessness for a being even it is lowly in hierarchy of society is still a creature of God furthermore He is with them. Although they might be low in this world it doesn’t mean that they are low in the sights of God. For God Himself had said: “The most high amongst you in the sight of God is the most pious.”

(iii) Justice

Even in his *jihad* against the French he employed the utmost courtesy towards God's creation as was possible. He upheld the principle of justice in his treatment of his prisoners. When asked what the reward for executing French prisoners is, the Amir responded, 10 lashes of the whip on the feet! However for prisoners who are alive the reward is 10 pieces of gold for each prisoner. As the Qur'an states: "O you who believe, be upright for God, witnesses in justice; and let not hatred of a people cause you to be unjust. Be just for that is closer to piety." [5:8]

This is also exemplified in the life of Hadrat Ali (a.s) who was fighting against an infidel when suddenly the infidel spat at him. Hadrat Ali walked away before the final stroke of his sword thus letting the infidel go. The latter enquired as to why he had not struck him, his famous reply was:

"I am wielding the sword for God for I am a servant of God, for when you spat at me I became angry on account of myself thus if I had struck you at that point it would have been solely to satisfy my own whims."

God says further in another surah:

"God forbiddeth you not from dealing kindly and justly with those who fought not against you on account of your religion nor drove you out of your homes. Truly God loveth those who are just" [50:8]

The Amir never treated the French as they had treated the Algerian Muslims, which was close to barbarity. Rather, he forgave them as Saladin had when he gained an advantage over them in battle.

I would like to mention here the story of how Abd al-Qadir had defended the Christians when they were attacked by the Druze in Damascus. It is reported that around 15,000 Christian lives were saved by the Amir and his followers from the onslaught of the Druze militants. When he was rebuked by the Druze for defending the Christians when he himself had fought against them in the past, the Amir responded by saying:

"If I slew the Christians it was in accordance with Shari'ah for they had declared war against me and were arrayed in arms against our faith."

Another leader of a resistance movement was Imam Shamil of Chechen-Dagestania heritage responded when he heard the Amir's exploits in defending the Christians:

"I was astonished at the blindness of the functionaries who have plunged into such excesses, forgetful of the words of the Prophet peace be upon him, 'Whoever shall be unjust towards a tributary who shall do him no wrong, who shall lay on him any charge beyond his means and

finally who shall deprive him of anything without his consent it is I who will be his accuser on the day of Judgment.”¹⁷

What we can conclude from this brief excursion into history is that Muslims nowadays should refrain from exacting revenge, or in other words revenge should not be within the theology of Muslims for the sake of liberation. Liberation theology does not teach that violence begets violence but it has to be based upon the concept of justice which is one of the principles of Liberation Theology. Justice means in Islam to put things in their rightful place. Following the Amir, justice is applied in dealing with your enemies as well as with your friends.

Conclusion

Liberation theology as it is expressed here has been framed within a Muslim framework. It would not be an exaggeration to say that what is normally discussed as Liberation Theology in other traditions or religions is basically the *jihad* spirit as we see it in Muslim traditions. However due to misunderstandings and the gross translation of the word *jihad* to holy war, the various nuances of *jihad*, the spirit that guides it and the spiritual message that underlies it have been discarded in its discussion. The attempts of scholars, such as Ameli, in bringing in the discussion of Liberation Theology, though alien in an Islamic environment, are attempts to address these lacunae which had resulted in this gross misunderstanding of *jihad*. Thus it would not be an exaggeration to say that the Liberation Theology that had been discussed here is the embodiment of the message of *jihad*. So if we were to talk today of *jihad* it should not be relegated to mindless assault and aggression but it should be complemented with the idea of Liberation Theology as it is framed here. Amir Abd al-Qadir is the prime example and embodiment of the spirit of Islam and Islamic guidance steeped in spirituality rightfully deserving the leadership of this theology. All other Muslim leaders need to orient themselves to such a figure so as to attain nearness to God which would yield justice and selflessness towards other individuals, regardless of religion or race.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ The Politics of Pan-Islam: Ideology and Organization, pg. 17
- ² Ibid.
- ³ Ibid., pg. 18
- ⁴ Answer of Jamal ad-Din to Renan, trans. into English in An Islamic Response to Imperialism by N. R. Keddie, pg. 181
- ⁵ Lecture on Teaching and Learning in above, pg. 106
- ⁶ Ibid.
- ⁷ Lecture on teaching and Learning, in An Islamic Response to Imperialism. pg. 107
- ⁸ From pg. 115-6
- ⁹ Quran 4:75 from Shakir translation 'And what reason have you that you should not fight in the way of Allah and of the weak among the men and the women and the children, (of) those who say: Our Lord! cause us to go forth from this town, whose people are oppressors, and give us from Thee a guardian and give us from Thee a helper.'
- ¹⁰ Quran 28:5 from Shakir translation 'And We desired to bestow a favor upon those who were deemed weak in the land, and to make them the Imams, and to make them the heirs,'
- ¹¹ Saied R.Ameli, 'Universality of Liberation Theology: One is Equal to All and All are Equal to One', in Arzu Merali and Javad Sharbaf (editors), *Towards A New Liberation Theology: Reflections on Palestine*, London: Islamic Human Rights Commission, 2009, 18.
- ¹² Ibid., pp.23-5.
- ¹³ Ibid., pp.26-8.
- ¹⁴ See Raphael Danziger, *Abd al-Qadir and the Algerians, Resistance to the French and Internal Consolidation*, New York, London: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1977, 230-1.
- ¹⁵ Ibid. 237
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Is there a liberation theology at work in Palestine?

Dr. Daud Abdullah

Liberation theology is often associated with Latin America. It was a direct response to the oppression and exploitation of the poor on the continent by multinational corporations and right wing dictatorships. Its aims were mainly liberation from poverty, illiteracy, and political dominance. This paper is inspired by an interest to explore what parallels and common trends existed between the Latin American experience and Palestine. More importantly, it seeks to determine how important has faith been as a driving force in the Palestinian liberation movement.

In its heyday, many members of the clergy, lay leaders, nuns and bishops who espoused liberation theology in Latin America were arrested, tortured and murdered. One of the most prominent victims of this period was Archbishop Oscar Romero. He was shot while celebrating mass in the Basilica of the Sacred Heart in San Salvador. It is believed he was assassinated by a member of the right wing organisation White Warrior Union.¹

Two weeks before his assassination Romero told a reporter, "I have often been threatened with death. Nevertheless, as a Christian, I do not believe in death without resurrection. If they kill me, I shall arise in the Salvadoran people. Martyrdom is a grace of God that I do not believe I deserve. But if God accepts the sacrifice of my life, let my blood be a seed of freedom. Let my death be for the liberation of my people."² Similar words were uttered by Shaykh Izz al Din al Qassam decades earlier when he launched his movement in Palestine.

Both individuals paid with their lives for the causes in which they believed. Christianity arrived in the Americas soon after the Spaniards crushed the last Muslim stronghold in Spain in the late 15th century. The Iberians who came to Latin America had two goals, to acquire wealth and spread the word of God. The priests followed the conquistadores. Several civilisations were exterminated in the process, most notably the Aztecs, Mayans and Incas. Throughout the history, relations between the indigenous people and the European colonisers were fraught with trouble as the poor grew poorer and marginalised. In September 1968, 130 bishops from every Latin American country gathered in the Colombian city of Medellin and issued a document which laid the basis of the liberation theology and charted a new approach to the mission of the church in the region.

Proponents of liberation theology have often emphasised the potential of religion to be a force for freedom and social development instead of dependence and apathy. Insofar as Palestine is concerned this paper focuses primarily on the quest for freedom.

Palestine – the Islamic perspective

Throughout its long history, Palestine has witnessed the rise and fall of many empires on its soil. Its strategic location at the crossroads of Africa, Asia and Europe rendered it a land of many encounters, often bitter and sometimes protracted. It was here in Palestine the Canaanites fought the Moabites and Ammonites, Greeks fought Persians, Jews fought Romans, Saracens fought Franks and Turks fought Europeans.

While much emphasis has been placed on these turbulent relations very little has been done to highlight its religious undercurrents. Palestine is the land of the prophets who made it the centre for the dissemination for their message.

For the Muslim, the Quran says, “Glorified be He Who carried His servant by night from the Inviolable Place of Worship to the Far Distant place of worship the neighbourhood whereof We have blessed, that We might show him of Our tokens! Lo! He, only He, is the Hearer, the Seer.” (17:1)

“And We rescued him and Lot (and brought them) to the land which We have blessed for (all) peoples.” (21:71) Ibn Kathir explains the land referred to in this verse is Bilad al Sham. He adds, what is deficient in the earth is augmented in Sham and what is deficient in Sham is augmented in Palestine.³

If Palestine is regarded as the heart of Bilad al Sham, Bayt al Maqdis (Jerusalem) is its heart. There are numerous prophetic traditions which affirm the virtues of Bayt al Maqdis and its noble Masjid al Aqsa. For Muslims, it was their first Qibla or direction to which they turned in prayer. Al Bara narrated, “We prayed with the Messenger of Allah toward the direction of Bayt al Maqdis for 16 months then we changed.” (Muslim)

Masjid Al-Aqsa is the second house built on the earth for the worship of Allah. Abu Dharr reported that he asked the Prophet (saw), “O Messenger of Allah, which Masjid was built first on earth?” The Prophet (saw) replied, “The Sacred Masjid of Makkah.” Abu Dharr (ra) again asked, “Which was next?” The Prophet (saw) said, “Masjid Al-Aqsa.” Abu Dharr (ra) further asked, “How long was the period between the building of the two Masjids?” The Prophet (saw) said, “Forty years. Apart from these, offer your prayer anywhere when it is time to pray, although excellence is in praying in these Masjids.” (Bukhari)

Abdullah Ibn Umar relates, I asked the Prophet (saw), “Apostle of Allah, tell us the legal injunction about (visiting) Bayt Al-Maqdis (Jerusalem).” The Apostle of Allah (saw) said, “Go and pray there. If you cannot visit it and pray there, then send some oil to be used in the lamps.” (Bukhari)

Muslims attachment and affinity to the land is deeply rooted. Indeed, they view the legacies

of many prophets as part of their religious and historical heritage. With this understanding, it seemed inevitable that the Zionist colonisation of Palestine would set in motion a reaction that was itself informed and inspired by faith.

The nature of the problem

There is no evidence to suggest that the problem in Palestine has arisen because Arabs and Muslims are innately anti-Semitic. If the Jews are the sons of Jacob, the Arabs are the sons of Ishmael and both were the sons of Abraham. The problem stems from one fact: that the Zionists occupied Palestine, expelled its indigenous people and imposed their presence in the land by force.

Although Zionism had existed in Europe as a theological doctrine as early as the 16th century, it only emerged as a political force in the late 19th century. By then, it had become a nationalist response to and consequence of the political persecution and social, legal and religious restrictions to which European Jews were subjected. They were not allowed to employ Christians, give evidence against Christians or even celebrate Jewish feasts.

Moshe Lilienblum (1843-1910), a key proponent of the idea of “auto-emancipation” suggested that the only solution to the Jewish problem was that they should cease being strangers and become citizens and masters in a land of their own. He suggested they should go to Palestine “to which we have historic right.”⁴

Subsequently, the First World Zionist Congress (29–31 August 1897) adopted the Basle Protocol which affirmed the Zionist aim of creating a national home for the Jews in Palestine. Article I upheld that the means to achieve this end was through the ‘colonisation’ of Palestine by Jewish agricultural and industrial workers. In the same vein, Article IV confirmed the need to secure government consent where necessary to realise the aim of Zionism.⁵

The Basle Congress entrusted Herzl with the task of finding a colonial power to sponsor the Zionist project in Palestine. In reality, he had already begun this search. In 1896, Herzl visited Constantinople accompanied by one Philip de Newlinski, a former Austrian diplomat who arranged a meeting for him with Sultan Abdul Hamid II. Because of the well-publicised indebtedness of the Ottoman Empire, Herzl suggested to his intermediary that he was prepared to help relieve the financial hardships facing the Sultan in return for his permission to establish a settlement near Jerusalem. No amount of financial assistance, however, seemed enough to entice Sultan Abdul Hamid.

During one of the encounters between Newlinski and the Sultan, the latter asked whether it was possible for the Jews to settle in another part of the Ottoman Empire. The Sultan was quite prepared to grant them residence as Ottoman citizens in any other part of his realm except Palestine. Newlinski replied, “Palestine is considered the cradle of the Jews hence they had the desire to return to it.” Abdul Hamid then declared, “Palestine is not considered the cradle of the Jews alone, instead it is viewed as the cradle of all the other religions.”⁶ When Newlinski

threatened that the Zionists would turn to Argentina, the Sultan made his famous reply:

“Advise your friend Herzl not to take any further steps concerning this matter because I am unable to compromise one foot of the Holy Land because it is not my possession; it is the possession of my people. My forefathers fought for this land and watered it with their blood. Let the Jews keep their millions. If my Empire is torn apart they may obtain a part of Palestine without having to pay anything. But they must first begin the dismemberment of our dead bodies. And I would not agree for the dismemberment of my body while I am alive.”⁷

Opposition to this project, manifested in immigration and land purchases, began to take shape long before the First World War. In 1902 Shaykh Rashid Rida wrote in his journal, *Al Manar*, that the Jews entering Palestine sought national sovereignty there and not simply a refuge from European persecution. The issue was in fact widely debated in the Arab media, namely in Egypt. According to the Palestinian historian Rashid Khalidi, over 600 articles on Zionism were published in a sample of 17 key newspapers from Cairo, Beirut, Haifa and Damascus between 1909 and 1914.⁸

One of the Palestinian leaders to meet Rida during this period was a certain Amin al Husayni, the future mufti of Jerusalem. In 1912 he was sent to study in Cairo where he came under the influence of Shaykh Rashid Rida. There he organised a Palestinian society to oppose Zionism. He realised the dangers posed by the growth of the Jewish population in Palestine which rose from 25,000 in 1882 to 85,000 in 1914.

After serving briefly in the Turkish army during the war, Amin al Husayni returned to Jerusalem in February 1917 and became part of the nascent nationalist movement. He was elected president of the Arab Club (*al Nadi al Arabi*) which together with the Literary Club (*al Muntada al Adabi*) and the Christian-Muslim Association (*al Jamiya al Islamiya al Masihiya*) was formed in 1918 to champion the Palestinian cause.

Shaykh Izz Al Din Al Qassam

In 1921 the opposition to the Zionist project assumed a more distinct Islamic character with the arrival of Shaykh Izz al Din Al Qassam in Palestine. Unlike the traditionalist scholars, Al Qassam encouraged participation in politics. He was previously a leading figure in the Syrian national uprising against the French (1918-1920). When the French military authorities sentenced Shaykh Izz al Din to death in absentia he fled the country and settled in the Palestinian port-city of Haifa.

Shaykh Izz al Din taught at the prestigious al Burj Islamic school in Haifa for three or four years after April 1921. In 1925 he became the imam of al Istiqlal Mosque when it was opened that year. The mosque soon became very famous because of al Qassam. His Friday sermons attracted people from far and wide.

It is believed that as early as 1925 Shaykh Izz al Din began to recruit cadres for his jihadist movement against the Zionists and British.⁹ He benefited from his position as imam of al Istiqlal Mosque and later as an appointed marriage registrar for the Haifa Shari'ah court in 1928. The latter appointment required extensive travel and contact with people throughout the Haifa district. Thus, it was through this intimate interaction and service in the community that Al Qassam's popularity grew both in the urban and rural areas.

Although the Qassamite movement did not proclaim its existence until much later on, it did carry out a number of military operations in the period between 1930 and 1933.¹⁰ These early raids, it appears, were intended to prepare his cadres and also test the British, Zionist and even Arab response. The Qassamites were waiting for the appropriate time to openly declare their Jihad against the British and Zionists.

When he finally decided to escalate their attacks, Shaykh Izz al Din and his associates withdrew to the Ya'bad Mountain near Jenin in October 1935. They were about 16 men altogether. Before his departure, al Qassam wrote to his friend Rashid al Hajj Ibrahim affirming; "I have confidence in myself, that my voice will be echoed everywhere after its first call. I urge you to call upon Allah, hoping that our protector the Almighty would bless our work in the service of our country."¹¹

Evidently, these sentiments of trust in God and service for country were similar to those expressed by Oscar Romero's shortly before his assassination. They indicate that theories of national liberation emanate from a common ethical and legal principle that every people have the God-given right to be free from alien occupation and exploitation.

Islam and Oppression

While the theory and practice of liberation theology is largely associated with Latin America this vibrant force is not unique to Christianity or to any geographic region. Its characteristics were manifested elsewhere where men of faith decided not to remain indifferent to human suffering and oppression.

Resistance to oppression is itself intrinsic to Islamic theology and traditions. Islam asserts unqualified support for the poor and oppressed. The Quran declares;

"How should ye not fight for the cause of Allah and of the feeble among men and of the women and the children who are crying: Our Lord! Bring us forth from out this town of which the people are oppressors! Oh, give us from thy presence some protecting friend! Oh, give us from Thy presence some defender!" (4:75)

Prophet Muhammad said;

“Fear the prayers of the oppressed for there is no barrier between his prayer and Allah.”

“The prayer of the oppressed is answered even if he is a disbeliever.”

He also stated that Allah said:

“My servants, I have made oppression unlawful for Me and unlawful for you, so do not commit oppression against one another...”

Imam Hasan Al Banna and Palestine

Toward the end of the 1920s, while Shaykh Izz al Din was preparing to embark on his jihad in Palestine, a new movement was born in Egypt. It would later develop to be one of the most influential political forces in the entire Islamic world and Palestine in particular.

From the time Imam Hasan al Banna founded the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt in March 1928 the movement played a pivotal role in championing the Palestinian cause. Its objectives of reviving the teachings of Islam, implementing them as a way of life, and liberating the Islamic lands from colonial domination found fertile ground in Palestine.

Al Banna’s interest in the Palestinian cause was inspired by his Islamic understanding. He believed Palestine is the homeland of every Muslim as it is the cradle of the prophets and location of Al Aqsa Mosque around which Allah blessed. On this basis he affirmed that the Palestinian cause is the cause of every Muslim. He drew a link between service for Islam and defence of Palestine. Indifference and negligence toward Palestine was, in his view, a disregard of Islam itself.

In June 1936 Al Banna wrote several letters to a number of Egyptian officials, emphasising this theme. The Muslim Brotherhood’s newspaper “Al-Ikhwān Al-Muslimun” [6/6/1936] quoted him:

“The Palestinian people are our brethren; those stopping short of helping Palestine, are actually stopping short of defending Allah and His messenger, and didn’t defend Islam; those who helped it and exerted efforts and money for it, defended Allah and His messenger and defended Islam.”

The heightened concern and involvement of the Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine came in the wake of a visit by two senior members of the Brotherhood, Abdur Rahman al Sa’ati and Muhammad Asad al Hakim to Palestine in August 1935 during which they met the Mufti of Jerusalem, Hajj Amin Al Hussayni. Some accounts recalled that a limited number of Egyptian volunteers had actually entered Palestine and participated in military operations in the north of the country during the 1936-39 Uprising.¹²

At the height of the Uprising, Al Banna reiterated this theme in "Al-Nazeer" magazine [25/3/1937]:

"Palestine is not the case of a specific geographical entity; it is rather the case of the Islam that you embrace; Palestine is an injured part of the Islamic body; any part that doesn't feel the pain and suffering of Palestine doesn't belong to that body or structure."

The Uprising reached its climax in the summer of 1938 with one city after another falling to the resistance. This culminated in the capture of the old city of Jerusalem in October 1938. It was at this point Britain decided to step up its counterattack by deploying more troops into Palestine. After it called up two military divisions, squadrons of aeroplanes, local police, the Transjordan Frontier Force, and 6,000 Jewish auxiliaries, the Palestinians were outnumbered ten to one. When the revolt was finally crushed in 1939 more than 5,000 Palestinians were killed and over 15,000 were injured.¹³

After the suppression of the 1936-39 Uprising, Al Banna established the special secret apparatus (Al-Nizam Al-Khas) within the Muslim Brotherhood in about 1940. The Muslim Brotherhood affirms that the most important reason for Al Banna's establishing Al-Nizam Al-Khas was to prepare its members to participate in the liberation of Palestine from the British Mandate.¹⁴ Like Shaykh Izz al Din al Qassam, Al Banna took utmost care in choosing the membership of this unit. They bought weapons from dealers who obtained them from the Western desert, which was then a major theatre of the Second World War.¹⁵

During the Second World War an increasing number of young Palestinians rallied to the call of the Muslim Brotherhood. It was not until after the War, however, that they opened their first branch in Palestine [in the Gaza Strip] under the leadership of Hajj Dhafir al Shawa.¹⁶ The indecision of the Arab governments toward the Zionist threat contrasted markedly with the resoluteness of the Muslim Brotherhood. Whereas seven Arab countries could only deploy 24,000 fighters in Palestine, against 70,000 Jewish regulars, Imam Hasan al Banna in October 1947 pledged 10,000 members of his movement as a first contingent.¹⁷ When he approached the Egyptian government to allow the volunteers to cross the border, it refused.

Notwithstanding the official obstacles, combatants from the Brotherhood were dispatched to Palestine before fighting erupted in December 1947. When Britain and the Arab states realised the seriousness of the Brotherhood, they hastened to stop the rising tide of volunteers from joining the jihad in Palestine. In the end, only a few hundred managed to cross over from Egypt.

They fought bravely in Rafah and Bir Saba'a. They also participated in the Battles of Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Khalil. Volunteers from other branches of the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria, Iraq, and Jordan also fought alongside their Palestinian brothers.

Despite the assassination of Al Banna on 11th February 1949, the Muslim Brotherhood re-emerged in the 1950s as a major political force in the Gaza Strip. Among the key figures who

contributed to this resurgence were Mustafa Hafiz, an intelligence officer, and Abdul Mun'em Abdul Rauf, an Egyptian army officer with close ties to both the Brotherhood and the Free Officers who had carried out the July 1952 coup in Egypt.

Ever since Imam Hasan al Banna founded the Brotherhood, it always regarded itself as an international Islamic movement. Underlying its support for the just causes of Muslims everywhere was the saying (hadith) of the Prophet Muhammad, "Whoever does not show an interest in the affairs of the Muslims is not from among us."

Several branches of the Brotherhood were set up across the West Bank and Gaza Strip in the early 1950s. The cadres in West Bank were absorbed into the movement in Jordan while those in Gaza became part of the movement in Egypt. Most of the Palestinian students who went to Egypt to pursue university education were from the Gaza Strip. They formed the Palestinian Students Union in Cairo. The Brotherhood dominated its administrative council. Notable among them were Yasser Arafat, Salim Za'anun, Salah Khalaf, and Abdul Fatah al Hammoud. They later went on to establish the Palestine National Liberation Movement – Fatah.

During the 1970s Islamic scholars continued to call for jihad against the occupation. The jihadist trend combined the Islamic faith with the teachings and meanings of nationalist patriotism. The growth of the Islamic movement was not confined to the West Bank and Gaza. In 1979 Shaykh Abdullah Nimr Darwish launched the 'jihad family' in Israel. This trend took root and quickly spread to Gaza where it gave birth to the Islamic Jihad Movement. There was however no organisational relationship between his movement and Islamic Jihad which was founded by Dr. Fathi Shiqaqi and Shaykh Abdul Aziz Audeh in 1980. The latter two were members of Muslim Brotherhood in Gaza under the leadership of Shaykh Ahmad Yasin. They left the movement in the mid seventies over differences of how to resist the occupation.

Given the background of its founders, Islamic Jihad is regarded as an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood. They hold the founder of the Brotherhood, Imam Hasan al Bana, as well as its celebrated thinker, Sayid Qutb, in extremely high regard. To no lesser degree, they have sought to follow in the traditions of the leader of the early 1930s resistance, Shaykh Izz al Din al Qassam.

Islamic Jihad was also influenced by the revolution in Iran. Their leadership sought to benefit from the teachings of Imam Khomeini. They were also influenced by the writings of Muhammad Abdul Salam Faraj, founder of the Islamic Jihad in Egypt. Shiqaqi in his book "Al Khomeini: al Hal al Islami wa al Badil" repeats the fatwa of Khomeini that it is a religious duty to fight Zionism and seek the establishment of an Islamic state in Palestine.

The centrality of Palestine in the ideology of Islamic Jihad was affirmed by Shaykh Audeh, "I am a Muslim Palestinian, and I consider Palestine the most important country in the Islamic world. I look forward to the establishment of an Islamic state in it."¹⁸

Islamic Jihad believes in armed struggle as a strategy of political work. It does not adhere to

the principle of implementing the Islamic law [Shari'ah] before the establishment of an Islamic state in Palestine. In its view, a free Palestine must be realised before a Muslim Palestine.

The emergence of HAMAS

The word Hamas is an acronym for Islamic Resistance Movement. It means zeal, enthusiasm, and courage. Hamas regards 8th December 1987 as the official date of its founding. Sometime in the early 1980s Shaykh Ahmad Yasin founded a military organisation – Al Mujahidun al Filastiniyun – to resist the occupation. It was discovered in 1984 and he was sentenced to 13 years in prison.

After the outbreak of the Intifadah in December 1987 Hamas formed its military wing, Kataa'ib al Shaheed Izz al Din al Qassam. Insofar as its political thought is concerned, it is centred around the following ideas:

That it is a jihadist movement that takes its teachings from Islam.

That the Palestine Question is basically an Islamic one and it is a responsibility on the shoulders of every Muslim, wherever he is.

Western colonial interests in the region merged with the aims of the Zionists in setting up the state of Israel in order to divide Islamic Ummah, weaken it and render it dependent.

That Palestinian national unity would be realised on the basis of a programme of resistance and liberation.

The struggle with the Zionist Jews is not about borders but is a struggle between truth and falsehood that continues from one generation to another.¹⁹

Conclusion

The Palestinian quest for freedom and independence is arguably the last of the great anti-colonial struggles. It is not the result of an historical antipathy for Jews. In some respects it bears certain similarities to the anti-colonialist and liberation movements that emerged in many parts of Africa, Asia and Latin America. By virtue of geography and history it has certain distinguishing features. Religion has been a driving force of the Palestinian struggle from the beginning.

One of the most outspoken Muslim scholars on the Palestine question, Shaykh Yusuf al Qaradawi, summed up the matter this way. "Our struggle with Israel is in essence a religious struggle, even though it has political, economic and nationalist dimensions." As Jewish nationalism is blended with religion like 'body and soul', he says it is not logical nor from the point of view to detach Islam from the struggle with Zionism. Since the enemy enters the battle armed with the teachings of his Torah so too Muslims must enter with the Quran.²⁰

Though inspired by the teachings of Islam, the struggle in Palestine, like Latin America, is also a response to injustice, dispossession and colonisation. In this light, however, it would be wrong

to reduce it to purely military engagement. In reality, it is about self esteem and dignity. As its goal is the good of the people as a whole, it entails cultural, intellectual and social components, rooted in Islam.²¹

Moreover, Islamic jurists are unanimous in their view that if any Islamic land is occupied, it is obligatory upon its people to resist, liberate their land and repel the enemy. If they are unable to do so, it becomes the duty of those closest to them to help and if they cannot, those further away should rally.²²

Some scholars further assert that if a group undertakes this duty then it absolves the others. Notwithstanding, there are scholars who affirm that it is fard ayn – a binding obligation on every Muslim. While some scholars hold the view it has to be sanctioned by the imam, others have rebutted to this, noting that since it is fard ayn, like prayer which does not require the permission of the imam, so too is jihad in this case.²³

Whatever the juridical differences, Musa Abu Marzouk, the deputy head of Hamas' political bureau, spelt out the position of the movement in an article published in the Los Angeles Times [6/1/2009];

“Our spirit to fight on is the legacy of collective suffering: With tens of thousands dead or wounded by decades of the “peace process,” you cannot find a family in Palestine - Muslim or Christian, Hamas, Fatah, PFLP or Islamic Jihad - without a son or daughter killed, injured, jailed or tortured, or which does not count itself or its kin among the millions of refugees living in UN camps. Hamas is not a handful of leaders. Israel might kill all of the current leadership in this round of violence, including me, and its organic, social infrastructure will not go away. We are, simply put, a home-grown national liberation resistance movement, with millions of people who support our struggle for freedom and justice.”

ENDNOTES

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- ⁵ Khan, Z. (1998) *Palestine Documents*, Pharos Media & Publishing: New Delhi.
- ⁶ A. al Na'imi, *Al Yahud wa al Dawlah al Uthmaniyah*, (Amman:1998), p.120
- ⁷ Ibid
- ⁸ R. Khalidi, "Palestinian peasant resistance to Zionism before World War I" in E. Said & C. Hitchens (eds.), *Blaming the Victims*, (London: 1988), p.230
- ⁹ M. Salih, *Al Tareeq ila al Quds* (London:1995), 173
- ¹⁰ Shaykh Izz al Din did not adopt any specific name to his movement. Names such as Jama'at al Qassam and al Qassamiyun became widely used after the shaykh was martyred on 19th November 1935 when the number of his supporters increased dramatically. See B.N. Al Hoot Al Shaykh Izz al Din al Qassam fi Tarikh Filastine (Beirut: 1987), p.40
- ¹¹ Ibid., pp.57-8
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- ¹⁹ Saleh, *Al Muqawamah al Musalah*, op.cit., p.192
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The early 21st century has seen much political upheaval world-wide. Whilst a new cycle of war and violence dominated the first few years, another and equally dramatic trend has seen the toppling of dictators in North Africa. Times are changing and yet movements within these struggles for justice are misunderstood and demonised.

This volume presents the papers of the eponymous seminar held in 2009 in London by the Islamic Human Rights Commission. They look at faith and struggle, notably the theory behind a universal liberation theology and their relevance to Muslim history. Using examples from 19th century Algeria and 20th and 21st century Palestine, the authors present an illuminating and inspiring introduction to recent Muslim history and its contribution to struggles for universal justice.

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